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LIFE SKETCHES
AND
ECHOES FROM THE VALLEY
BY
MARIANNE FARNINGHAM.

THIRD SERIES

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AND

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BY

MARIANNE FARNINGHAM,

Author of "Lays and Lyrics of the Blessed Life," "Home Life," "Girlhood," "Boyhood," &c. &c.

Third Series.

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LIFE SKETCHES,

AND

ECHOES FROM THE VALLEY.

A Houseful of Children.

"There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,
She had so many children she didn't know what to do."

MANY people feel a pity for those women who are illustrations of that old rhyme. And there are plenty of them, for among modern improvements large houses at small rentals are not yet known, so that in cases where the number of olive branches is the largest, the table at which they gather is often wonderfully small. Indeed in many English homes of to-day, among the working classes the children seem to fill the rooms from cellar to garret, and even then it is impossible to take many steps without danger of treading upon some of them. At Conway Church there is buried a man named Hookes, who was the forty-first child of his father, and he himself had twenty-seven children. Such families are of course rare, but large families are as plentiful as blackberries in autumn. Still we confess we should like to have had a peep into the domestic arrangements of this family of Hookes, and to have seen where and how the children were disposed of. Had the house benches around the walls on which the children were set? Did they take their meals in separate companies? How did they sleep? In round beds, or in hammocks slung one above the other? It is a pity they have left no record of their ingenious contrivances, for it would have been helpful to many women to-day who,

though more moderate than the Hookeses, "have so many children they don't know what to do."

Is a large family a blessing or a curse? Public opinion in these modern times is, upon many points, greatly different from what it used to be; and upon this particular subject it has undergone a change. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; happy is the man that has his quiver full of them." This was the ancient verdict. "It is impossible for him to rise, poor man; he is to be greatly pitied, for he has so many children." This is the modern opinion. There may be here and there a woman who prays, "Give me children or else I die," but probably they add to the words a mental reservation, "but not too many of them."

And yet there is no doubt but that still as before children may be, ought to be, are intended to be, nothing but blessings. And that they are so is evident from the fact that the father-heart of the man who has to toil and save for them cannot bear to part with one. It is true that there are lines of care upon his face all the earlier for them, and his hair turns grey while he is yet young, but he would not give up one of them for all the world. If sickness should touch either of the little forms and change the bright eyes which are his delight, that would be a greater trouble than all his care for them has brought.

As for the mother, upon whom necessarily the greater part of the work and wear must fall, her life is so full and complete that she would be exceedingly loth to give it up even for "the rest that remaineth." And though she works so hard, and has so much anxiety, she does not age so rapidly as those who were once her girl-companions, and who have remained in single blessedness. Perhaps we are old or young according as our hearts are. And the heart of the woman with a dozen children cannot grow old. It is warmed into youthful tenderness every day of her life by the little loving creatures who gather about her feet and nestle to her side.

> "Life is labour; but love is rest,
> And sweet to the feel of the brooding breast
> Are the little brown heads within the nest."

It is true that she has to keep at work from early morning

until late at night, but when at last she sees the children safely tucked into their snug little beds, her evening prayer is almost certain to be two-thirds of it praise, excepting when some of the children have croup or measles, whooping-cough or scarlatina. It is true that the mountain of socks and stockings waiting to be darned is enough to frighten a timid woman; but it is ten to one that while she is gradually undermining it she is so busy crooning cradle-songs that she forgets to be discouraged. And if she is so happy amid her labours, and so gratefully content with her lot, there is certainly no need to pity her.

And then there is that crown of a parent's joy, the hope of what the children may be. How many a day-dream, suggested by some manifestation of power or talent in a child, has the mother as she sits and ponders at her work. How often the father is cheered in the midst of his business as he looks on a few years and pictures his fair-haired girls in happy homes of their own, and his boys filling honourably honourable positions. Of course these may be castles in the air, and nothing more! But the probability is that at least some of them will be realised, and that the children will follow in the father's steps, and be a comfort to the declining years of those who so lovingly tend them in childhood.

Sometimes it is thought that it is bad for the children themselves when there is a large family. In some respects it may be. They cannot be pampered and indulged so much, which is a good thing for them. But neither can they receive so good an education, nor be enabled to start in so good a position in life. Still, notwithstanding that they have to leave school sooner, and begin to earn their own living, and earlier learn the lessons of industry and self-reliance, it is, on the whole, a great advantage to belong to a large family. The tie which often is, and always should be, so strong between brothers and sisters may be of the greatest good to them. And it is well for the children to be obliged to form the habit of giving up to each other which must regulate the household if there is to be peace at all. It is from the large families that chivalrous lads and self-forgetful girls come. Let a boy have to take care of a frail little sister, and see how gentle and yet strong it will help to make him. The chances are

that he will be a thousand times more manly and good than if he had himself been petted and thought of the most. And see what a sweet and noble woman the eldest daughter of a large family often becomes. She cannot well be given up to vanity and frivolity, for there are little ones to tend and care for and love; and though she may be steadied beyond her years, she has to make up for the loss of girlish light-heartedness, that which is woman's greatest reward, the appreciation and clinging love of those for whom she lives.

Fathers, and especially mothers of large families, are apt to feel a little discouraged sometimes because they cannot do everything. They cannot exert all the influence they wish. There is so much to do for the bodies of the children that little time is left to give to their minds and the formation of their characters. But there is such a thing as silent, unconscious influence. Those who have little time to talk to their boys may yet be preaching constantly most impressive sermons by their lives. And, after all, this is the surest way.

A man might lecture his boys every day about truth; but if they heard him tell a falsehood it would go for nothing. Or he might never say a word to them about uprightness, but if he were an upright man himself, his boys would know it, and imbibe something of his spirit.

There *is* cause for anxiety where there is a large family. Different dispositions require different treatment, and there is certainly plenty to call out the parents' watchfulness and prayer. But Christian fathers and mothers have at least some words to encourage them. "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in His commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth, the generation of the upright shall be blessed." "I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring." "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children." "For the promise is unto you and to your children."

Last Links.

We are all our lives weaving chains. We begin while our baby fingers are as yet weak and unsteady, and we do not cease until old age has made them tremulous and feeble. As we live our years, link after link is added, sometimes with infinite care and painstaking by ourselves, oftener by an unseen hand far more skilful than our own.

We are for ever gathering treasures. When the grass is wet with early dew, when the sun ascends and brightens the whole world with its noontide splendour, even when the silent night spreads its star-jewelled canopy over the cool earth, still do we continue our search, and still do we find what we seek. Sometimes we dive into dark waters, bringing up hidden pearls of joy and beauty; sometimes the diamond brilliancy of a far-off prize has quickened our steps and shortened the leagues lying between us and it; sometimes, unexpected and unsought, the treasures are presented to us, and the surprise of joy makes us glad. But always, by various means, we are collecting treasures of knowledge, love, and happiness.

And yet what have we to show for it all? How long is the chain to which all our lives we have been adding links? How full is our cabinet of the treasures which we have been so industriously gathering? Year after year we have toiled, and, alas! even now the chain is short and meagre, and our casket is only half full. It is true we have wrought and gathered, but we have also loosed and dropped. We had our treasures, but the box that held them was insecure, and one by one they have been stolen away. We weaved our chain, but it was not strong, it has fallen to pieces, and we have dropped the links down in the valleys and upon the hills, among dead leaves, and in hidden graves; and the gifts which once we had are ours no longer.

Is it not so? What has become of the knowledge which with such pains we acquired in youth? We have not needed a particular gem, so we let it lie by, and forgot it, and lo! when we want it and look for it, it has disappeared altogether. It is true we have gained others, our chain is not altogether broken up, nor our jewel-box

empty, but the contents are very different from those which gladdened us years ago.

Then how many links of friendship have been dropped as we have gone on our way! Names which were once ever upon our lips and in our hearts are never spoken now. If we hear them they are like strains of long-forgotten music, and the notes, sweet as they are, smite us with pain and bring tears into our eyes. What has become of our friends? We have lost them in all directions. They are in other lands, they have passed into another world, they are altogether changed, and, though they pass our very doors, are farther from us than if oceans divided us. We scarcely know how we came to lose them. We cannot remember their disappearance. Very few of these links were wrung violently from the chain; they dropped off slowly and unobserved, but they are completely gone, and even if we could retrace our steps, which we cannot do, we might not be able to find them again.

Then we have lost some precious things in the way of emotions and experiences. Once how gay we were! we were brimful of life; we had energy enough for anything. We cannot feel so now, however much we may desire it.

That treasure has fallen from the casket; we have a few things instead—languor, weariness, and so on; but they are no such precious possessions as those we have lost. Once what peace we had! But our serenity has been mislaid or lost. Once how strong we were! but now we have only weakness instead.

What becomes of our lost treasures? Are they indeed really lost, destroyed altogether—annihilated? No; nothing that God makes can perish. Everything is enduring. We have let them slip out of our keeping, but may not He have taken care of them? Perhaps they were too costly for us here, and He may be saving them for us at home. When we are older and wiser, when we have left school, and reached maturity, when He sees that we are able to appreciate our treasures and take care of the chain, perhaps He may give them back, unaltered and still beautiful, into our more skilful hands.

Between the Lights.

THE summer brings bright, long days, and all of us will give them a welcome. So many hours of light surely bring many opportunities for good and various work, which, if we are wise, we shall strive to improve. But the summer brings something more. It gives us a full hour of evening twilight, a time between the day and the dusk which may be, if we use it rightly, full of rest and blessing to ourselves and others.

Of course there are some people, thrifty, industrious, and good, who gather up the fragmentary minutes that they be not lost, and who have all sorts of odd pieces of work saved to be done at this especial time. All honour to industry; but surely twelve or fourteen hours of daylight are long enough to work in, and we may take the time between the lights for doing nothing but what we will. It may be indicative of natural indolence, but we think it very delightful to let busy hands do nothing, and even the head and the heart only such things as are recreation. In these bustling, eager days we work too much and reflect too little. It is well to steal away out of the rush and excitement, and give a little portion of our time to quiet thought.

Did you ever notice, as you sit alone between the lights, what a change takes place in your estimation of different things? All the day you are anxious and troubled about this life. You are as busy and excited as the rest of the world. They race and you race with them. All their powers are put forth and so are yours. You are afraid lest you should be left behind, and so you struggle and pant and toil with all your might. You too eagerly catch the moments and get as much out of them as possible. The beauty of the world, the quiet of religious calm, dreams of the heavenly home with its river of life, and harpers harping with their harps, come quietly up to your heart with mute entreaty, but you dare not let them into your thought. The present is so imperative, so all engrossing, so supremely important, that you feel as if nothing may interfere with it. But how different it is between the lights.

The things of the world, its hopes, and ambitions, and struggles, sink down considerably lower, and your heart opens to other and surely better influences. It does not matter so much to you now that you have gained such an amount by the day's labour. It is not so bitter a thing that some one has gone beyond you. You look back a little wonderingly on all the fuss you have made, and care a great deal more about being good than being rich. For the noise of carriages, and footsteps, and machines, and rough voices is dying away, and you hear with a sort of tender observation how happily the children are playing in the distant street, and how sweetly the nightingales are singing their passionate, pensive songs. You do not care to think about large buildings, and fine houses, and rich dresses, for your eyes are caught and held by the opal colours in the western skies, and your thoughts wander even beyond them while some mystic words steal into your memory. "And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

The time between the lights is, as everybody knows, a very tender time. You want your beloved ones near to you. You begin to feel sorry for all the quick, hard words you have spoken to them during the day. You had other things to think about then, but now you find yourself caring very much that nothing shall grieve them or lessen their love for you. Home grows dearer than it was in the morning. The fields around your house are more beautiful with the shadows upon them than they were when all the daisies had their eyes wide open. Your gardens, with their two or three trees, and common flowers, make you think of Eden. And your own room over which the dusk is stealing, grows quiet and restful until you fancy that a benison of peace is breathed over it. You can scarcely see the faces that are there, but you feel that they are beautiful because they belong to you. To-morrow, at eleven o'clock in the morning, all this will seem nothing but nonsense and waste of time; but between the lights, if you allow yourself to be still, you cannot help feeling tender.

Surely it must have been between the lights that the prodigal son came to himself and said, "I will arise and go

to my father." For that is the time when so many of us do come to ourselves. We see how worldly and foolish and forgetful we have been. We think of our Father's love and all He has done for us, and wish we were better children than we are. And somehow, as it gets darker we find our way to Him, and ask not for success, not strength to toil, not for riches or honour or greatness, but only for His forgiveness.

Are we better or worse, weaker or stronger, for the hour between the lights? Surely the time is not lost, though all it seems to do is to make us sing—

"Abide with me: fast falls the eventide."

For Somebody's Sake.

"For Hiram was ever a lover of David."

It is wonderful how much is done by all sorts of people for the sake of others. The temple had to be built; Solomon was ready and eager to begin, but he could not do it entirely alone. Hiram, King of Tyre, sent his servants unto Solomon. David knew that this Hiram possessed an abundance of timber, so he sent a message to him requesting that he would furnish some. "Hiram was ever a lover of David," and when he heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly, and his love showed itself in the grateful words which he used: "Blessed be the Lord this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people." But did his love spend itself in words only? Would he send the timber for the Lord's house? "So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire." He might have done the same in consideration of the "twenty thousand measures of wheat, and twenty measures of pure oil," but he certainly never would have sent to Solomon at all, only "Hiram was ever a lover of David."

Love is a wonderful thing, and hard to be appeased. It never can do enough. Even when it has loaded its

beloved with all the wealth it possesses, it is not satisfied —it must go on showering its blessings from father to son. There are plenty of Hirams in the world to-day, and there are plenty of Solomons all the better off for it. Many a young scapegrace is regarded with favour, watched over, assisted and cared for, not by any means because he deserves, or has any right to expect it, but just because of the name he bears, or a feature in his face, or the tone of a voice, which is like a friend who is gone. He is loved for somebody else's sake. "I was his father's friend." That is enough. Take care of him, pray for him, teach him, take all his anxieties and even his sins to yourself, love him as much as you can for his father's sake.

Why do we so readily undertake a responsibility for the sake of a departed friend? Perhaps because he is departed. "Blessings brighten as they take their flight." Our friends are dearer than ever when they have passed away. Already they have exchanged their earth-soiled robes, and are dressed as angels in our minds; all that was little and mean and sinful has passed away, only the good remains; the dross has fallen off, we see only the purest and finest gold. But we love our friends too late. Who has stood beside the open grave, and heard the solemn words "Ashes to ashes," without a regret that has more bitterness than anything else could bring, born of the conviction that some time or other he has failed toward his friend? He has been less pitiful, less true, less friendly than he might have been. And so it seems almost like an atonement to make up to the children what has been kept from the fathers. The heart can almost satisfy itself now. There is some one left for whom our friend cared; we will give that one all the tenderness which *he* would have lavished upon him. Perhaps—who knows?—even our friend in heaven will understand why we do it, and that it is all for somebody's sake.

Those who love Jesus have plenty to do for His sake. Even to give a cup of cold water to a repugnant, unappreciating person is not in itself a pleasant thing. But then we do it for Jesus' sake. There are many so besotted in ignorance and vice, that we cannot love them. But the All-merciful would have touched them, laid His hands upon them, and healed them. Only tender, pitiful words

would have fallen from His lips. No scorn, no contempt would have crushed these miserable sinners if He instead of us had to speak. Well, then, for His sake we can surely do as He would have us!

Ought we not? We are ourselves constant petitioners of the mercy which we are asked to extend to others. We are bowed down with guilt; we have offended our Father; how shall we dare to look in His face? Yet we may do so "for Jesus' sake." Happy are we; for though there is nothing in ourselves, we shall be loved and pitied, blessed and accepted for somebody else's sake.

Fear Not.

As we look down into the dark vista of coming months we can scarcely do so without fear. For is it not with us as it once was? Once, indeed, we had happy dreams and fair picturings, and no limit to our anticipations. Always we stood on the threshold of a palace of delights, while the rosy hues of the warmth and brightness within fell upon our faces, and made us glad with a wild joy of expectation. But we have grown wiser and sadder since. We are not so easily deceived now as formerly, and our expectations are far more moderate now than then. And, indeed, instead of being lifted up with too much hope, we are likely to be depressed by too much fear.

We look forward with a feeling of dread and misgiving. We shall have dark corners to pass, round which may be hidden all sorts of terrible things. We shall have rivers or seas to wade through, and the waters may be very cold and deep. We shall have hills to climb, and our feet are already footsore. We have to go forth to the battle, and the enemies are all armed Goliaths, while we have nothing but pebbles to fight with. Is it any wonder that we are afraid?

But why do we fear? Have we any misgivings about our Guide? Do we imagine that He will mislead us, or that He will be absent or forgetful in the time of our

adversity? Do we think He will ever fail us? Are we afraid that those who trust in Him shall ever be confounded? We cannot be. Our fears have all reference to ourselves, and never to Him. He is strong, and steadfast, and true. He is faithful and unwavering in His tenderness. No change can come over Him. We cannot, dare not, doubt Him. We may doubt our friends—our dearest and our nearest—ourselves, every one, but we cannot doubt our Lord. And this thought, this strong assurance, may well cheer and comfort us. There is one abiding Friend—One who is so constant that we shall never raise appealing eyes to Him without meeting His ever-responsive love.

And if so—if "He who is our life" is so strong and faithful, and tender, is there any real reason that we should fear for ourselves? That is what we do at present. We fear that we shall turn out of the strait and narrow way, and find ourselves in "By-path Meadow." We fear that we shall fail in our duty, and grow languid and indolent when we ought to be diligent and earnest. We fear that our love will grow cold when it ought to be fervent. We fear that we shall fail to do the perfect will of God. And so, indeed, we shall if we trust even in the least degree to ourselves. If we think we can walk well, if we imagine that by great effort on our own part we shall please God more, and live grander lives, we are indeed mistaken. "Without Me ye can do nothing." How often must these words ring in our ears before we believe them? "All things are possible," but only when we are "looking unto Jesus." "I can do all things *through Christ, who strengtheneth me.*" Certainly not otherwise. But those who are in Christ Jesus walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Dear friends, let us give up trying, and take to trusting. Let us be content to fail of ourselves, that no honour may come to us, but all go to the Master. Let us offer ourselves really and truly to Him, being willing to be taught only as He will teach us. Let us strive to be empty, that we may be filled with Him. We shall be happier and more peaceful, and altogether free from fear, even of ourselves, if we are content to lose ourselves in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

He Doeth Well.

He doeth well, though oftentimes we seem to toil in vain,
And though the blessing tarry that would make amends for pain;
Where'er we rest, whate'er we do, oh, not in vain is given
The blessing that can make us glad as the fruitful dew of heaven.

He doeth well who loveth us, although His hand may smite,
And early draw around our heads the curtains of the night.
Although His voice may sound severe, it yet is full of love,
And what we understand not here we shall at home above.

He doeth well in gloomy days, when hope shall faint and fail,
His arm is strong, His love is great, His mercy must prevail,
And though the sorrow lasteth long, His comforts make us glad:
He gives the song to mourners, and the pleasure to the sad.

He doeth well; oh, nevermore should doubting words be said,
But let us only cling to Him in the dark hour of dread.
And nought can come of pain or joy, of song, or hopeless knell,
But we may say in loving trust, He doeth all things well.

Crowded Lives.

ARE some lives really very much fuller than others, or do they only appear so? Perhaps all lives, however placidly and leisurely they may seem to pass, are in reality full of incident and interest. Onlookers cannot see everything. And there is so much hidden life connected with every

person, that it is scarcely possible for us to judge correctly of each other. Nor is it at all necessary that we should judge at all. There is enough in one's own life to afford matter for conjecture and reflection.

And one thing which will probably strike all, is that *we* have very crowded lives. Whatever may be the case with other people, there is in our own life no lack of incident, no dearth of absorbing interests. Our lives are as full as they can hold. We are obliged to be constantly doing something to prevent ourselves from being overwhelmed by a torrent of duties. We think, and plan, and endeavour; we strive, and fight, and execute; we endure, and suffer, and grow weary. There is with few of us any need to wish—as the young so often do—that something may happen to us; quite enough things happen to us every day. Occurrences follow each other so rapidly that we have scarcely breathing time between. We are surprised by sudden emergencies that call forth all our powers. We are startled by unexpected difficulties which we have to surmount. We are compelled to perform unanticipated tasks. Joy comes to us out of dark clouds, in swift, lightning-like flashes; and sorrow, even in summer-time, rolls above us in thunder-claps. If we would at all keep up with the times in which we live there are not only great but very constant demands upon our strength; and our lives are so crowded that space for leisure or ease is denied to at least many.

Perhaps we all feel content that our lives should be so full. As they are never very long it may be well to have as much in them as we can possibly put. And no doubt many people crowd as much into a year as would have sufficed our slower-going forefathers for eighteen months. We have lost all taste for an insipid existence, and prefer our own way to theirs.

But who does not feel that after all—however much we may crowd them—our lives will not hold everything? Some things are pushed altogether out of them that are great losses, if we only knew it. We see a man who amazes us by his power; he can do almost everything; his brain is constantly at work; he manages two or three businesses; he thinks not only for himself but for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of others. What a full life his is! Yes, but some things are crowded out. He has

strength, shrewdness, foresight, genius even, and, better than all, success. But he has not everything, as one can tell by looking at him. He has not happiness, nor serenity, nor peace of mind. There are some homes from which it is sad to find love altogether pushed out; the members of the family are so busy getting money, and dress, and position, that they have neither time nor space for tenderness. Something must be crowdéd out,—let it be love. In some other places it is refinement that has to be excluded; in others it is good temper; in many it is health. From how many hearts is religion crowded out! Pleasure; wealth, fame, love—they must all come in; but when it is Christ who stands at the door there is no room for *Him* in the inn! If sometimes He is invited to enter, how many other guests, treated far better than Himself, will He find there? How can He stay? What have ambition, and envy, and hatred, and pride to do with Him?

It is very plain that some of our lives are too crowded: something must be pushed out; what shall it be?

Let us make a wise selection. Let us not crowd out the Friend who could alone fill our souls with satisfaction and peace.

Waiting.

It is wonderful how many disagreeable things we have to do in this life. And one of them is to wait. We are very apt to be impatient, to be equal to working or even enduring, when we feel almost unequal to the calm and quiet of simple waiting. And yet how much of it we have to do! How many hours have to be passed, not in the strife, with the battle-cry nerving us to action, not in the race for the prize, not in doing great things, but in quiet sitting down with folded hands and patient hearts!

For we cannot wait properly without these. If God sees that the discipline which is necessary for us is just this,

and sends it, and we are so displeased that we fret and fume, and worry ourselves into a fever of impatience, then we are not waiting really.

It is wonderful what different ways there are of doing this same thing. If we happen to be spending a morning at a railway-station, we see how persons are affected by it. One has an hour to wait for a train, and he saunters up and down the platform or lounges on a seat in the waiting-room with a most placid and contented smile upon his face. Another has to wait half an hour, and he goes off into a passion, scolds the officials, makes himself disagreeable to his companions in tribulation, threatens to write to the papers, and is altogether anything but patient.

But there are more painful things than this kind of waiting. Do we not know what it is to have striven and watched, have risen early and worked late, and then have had to wait for success? Patience then, is a very necessary virtue. It is not easy to be content to wait when we expected the blessing earlier. But it is often good to wait even for this.

It is a painful thing to wait on a sick bed. To suffer pain and weariness and hope deferred, while the long hours pass by and the faint heart grows fainter still. But we see some waiting thus in patient confidence and trust, not passionate, nor eager, not anxious or impatient, but, not knowing whether life or death is before them, lying still and simply waiting. Oh, it is surely not of themselves that the restless spirit is curbed, the eager heart still. And it should comfort us to know that God does not make His children wait without giving them the necessary power.

There is another waiting still. It is when heart and flesh have failed, when the pulse is low, and the eyes are dim, when hope dies, at least with reference to this life, and there is nothing to do but be quiet and listen for the sound of the wings of the dark angel. And yet how many are thus waiting now! Earth is receding, though heaven does not yet loom in sight. They have spoken their farewell to their friends who have walked with them hitherto, though the angel's greeting has not yet reached them. Day and night, in isolation and silence, they wait for the summons. But it shall come soon. They know that. And they shall arise and have what they have hoped for

and reach the home where there will be no longer need of patience.

Let us be content to wait. God help us not to be impatient and hasty; but may we be quiet and resigned, even when the time is long! For He will not mock our patience. His blessings are worth waiting for.

The Necessity of War.

We have heard a great deal about "the sad necessity of war." But are the words really truthful and well chosen? It is sad beyond all possibility of doubt or power of expression; but are we quite assured that it is also a necessity? Our hearts have been horrified by terrible stories of wholesale bloodshed and murder; but was it obliged to be? Has the fight been a sacred one? and are the slain only a host of martyrs? Was it impossible either to prevent it or to do without it? Was it in very truth necessary to the world or even to a single nation?

It may be ignorance of matters too profound for any but wiser minds, but we cannot ourselves see where the need was, nor what adequate good there is to result from it. And this we feel with regard to all wars. A misunderstanding arises between two or three men, who happen to be placed in high and responsible positions. One man insults another, and angry passions are aroused. Very well, let them settle their quarrel between themselves. If there must be fighting, if boasted civilisation and even Christianity can find no other way, let those who have quarrelled fight it out. The young men cultivating their farms and courting the lasses whom they hope to make their wives, have not quarrelled; why should they be called out to strew other fields with their dead bodies? The middle-aged men, doing their duty as fathers of families, spending their time and brains in inventions of machinery and other aids to progress, do not hate the men of other lands; why should they leave their homes to kill and slay those with whom they have not so much as a quarrel? And the

old men who have done what they could and only wish to die in peace, why should they be summoned to the terrible sights and sounds of the battle-field? And then, there are the women and children, the widows and orphans, who had better have been slain too than forced to live on in empty houses and with breaking hearts. What have they done who know nothing about foreigners, except a little pity for them because they *are* foreigners, that this woe should be brought upon them? Oh, is it not time that all this should cease, and that monarchs and their ministers, or whoever they are who cause and declare war, should be compelled to settle it themselves, instead of wickedly dragging the innocent and unoffending to destruction? Let them fight a duel by all means if they wish it, only let their peoples go free.

But duelling is to be abolished from the face of the earth; it is a wrong and barbarous thing. Is there any common-sense left in the world? It is wrong for two men to talk about pistols, and an early meeting in some quiet spot, with the understanding that one shall be shot. It is a just and holy thing for thousands of men to stand face to face with each other and shoot each other down with as much rapidity as possible! Murder is so wrong in detail, that if a man in the heat of passion take another's life, he must be scorned, and hated, and executed; he is so bad that the righteous world will hold him no longer! But wholesale murder is another thing! If the man at the bidding of his officer exert himself and contrive to take not one life, but a score or two, he is a hero, and deserves a medal, and will hereafter be crowned and petted in the drawing-rooms, as if the blood on his hands were a thing to be coveted!

There is only one thing more absurd, and we saw it at the beginning of the war between France and Germany. It was the great and good efforts made to provide hospitals, doctors, nurses, and other necessaries for the sick and wounded, while there were only strong and stalwart men with nothing the matter with them, and who ought not and need not have been sick and wounded; and it was also, the immense orders for widows' bonnets and black crape, while husbands and brothers were full of life and health! And now, when all have been used, when vil-

lages have been burnt, and bodies buried by thousands, what is there but heart-sickness and grief as relics of this most unholy and absurd war?

Let us talk no more about the "sad necessity." It is idle to speak thus at such times as these. Are not the people greater than kings and stronger than governments? If they say, "We will not fight," who is to make them? Let them obey all righteous laws right loyally; but when God says, "Thou shalt not kill," shall they obey man, who bids them take mitrailleuses and chassepots that they may do the more murder?

War is a terribly guilty thing; and though almost always a few persons are the most to blame, yet there are very many others who are not guiltless. Those who, either by spoken orations or written words, stir up the people to strife and hatred until they forget that they are brothers, and think only that they are enemies, are not guiltless. Those who fan the flame of ambition or jealousy in the breasts of monarchs are not guiltless. Those who write war songs strong with subtle passion are not guiltless. And the men themselves who, though they are men and can be brave as heroes, yet allow themselves to be slaughtered by thousands, instead of banding together in peaceful resistance, are not guiltless.

How long is it to continue? Surely there will be better times when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks, for the Lord hath spoken it. But cannot we hasten it on? Cannot we at least help to make the next generation a peace-loving one? We are teaching our children not to be cruel. And surely we shall soon also teach them that it must be in the sight of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, a most sinful thing to take away human life. But let us exercise a little common sense about it. Let us not talk to them of glorious victories, and say nothing of suffering and dying men. Let us not provide them with mimic swords and guns for toys, nor solicit their admiration for red coats. Let us teach them that the pomp of war is the pomp of death. If they grow up, hating wrong but loving their fellows; if they are trained to be soldiers of Him who said, "Blessed are the peace makers," we shall soon have heard the last about "the sad *necessity* of war."

The Fruit of a Lesson.

SOME years ago, a mother spent a Sunday evening in giving a lesson to her little boy on these four words:—

"THOU SHALT NOT KILL."

It was so plain and forcible that it impressed him very strongly; and she afterwards overheard him say, in his prattling way,—"Paul will never kill anything again; for mamma said that only God could make life, and only He should take it away."

And so the lesson bore its first fruits even while childhood lasted; for Paul, different from many boys who seem to be inherently cruel to weak and defenceless things, never took away the life of fly or spider, or anything that the great God had made.

As he grew older, life became even more a sacred thing to him. He was a brave lad, and belonged to that noble corps whose duty it is to hasten to the rescue of houses and men threatened by fire. He feared no flames; he would scorn danger if a little child were to be saved, or an old woman helped. But he could never read a newspaper account of a murder, or of the death-punishment inflicted upon any fellow-creature, without enduring positive suffering and shedding bitter tears.

One day, not so very long ago, this Sunday-school boy, grown now to a young man, came to his mother, who sat at home, in fear and trembling.

A look into his face assured her that something had happened.

"My son, tell me."

"It is all settled, mother. We are ordered to the war at once."

"Well, Paul?"

"Well, mother, you know without my telling you that I will never fire a shot, and no power on earth shall make me."

"But you must go, Paul; they will force you."

"I shall go, mother, because, as you say, I am obliged;

but be very sure of this, no one will be wounded or slain by my hands."

"But," said the mother, secretly rejoiced, but more than half frightened, "you should try to beat the enemy; your country demands it."

He smiled at her.

"I cannot believe that my country would be any the gainer for my having committed a murder," said he. "I love my countrymen, but I do not hate my enemies. How can I, when I am the servant of Christ, who has taught me the blessedness of peace? I must go into this horrible battle, but I am sure that the old command, 'Thou shalt not kill,' will sound louder in my ears than any general's orders."

Only a day or two afterwards Paul held his mother to his heart and kissed her for the last time.

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" she said brokenly; "why should this cruel strife rob me of you? What would be the good of victory to me if my son should be killed? Paul, do you know that you may be slain upon that terrible battle-field?"

He looked down at her with his steadfast, undimmed eyes.

"I am not afraid to die, my mother. If my country wants my life she can have it; but if they come to you after the battle with news that I am among the dead, you may know that I have no man's blood upon my soul, but that God has in mercy taken me out of the strife into His peace. If it were not for you, mother, I should be glad to think that it would be soon; for indeed"—and here the brave young voice faltered—"I do not know how I shall bear the sights of suffering and death."

And so this boy went away to the war.

It was noticed that before he was engaged he was able to render assistance to the wounded, and that he was among the most active in the burial of the dead.

He was never heard to complain, although he must have been as hungry as the rest, and although he slept for several nights upon the wet ground, with the rain pouring upon him, after enduring the toilsome and fatiguing march which must have told upon a frame never robust and strong.

He had no fear. When at last the enemy's fire opened upon them, and his regiment was foremost in the fight, he was cheerful and courageous, and those next to him declared afterwards that they heard him softly singing, as if to himself.

He was almost the first to fall, mortally wounded.

As they came trampling over him in the eagerness of the battle, they heard him speak twice.

The first was that cry heard the most frequently in all battle-fields where the wounded and dying lie—

"*Mother!*"

The next was a sentence full of wonderful power—

"'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'"

And then the *Christian* soldier died.

He had fought a good fight, had he not? Surely he has received the conqueror's crown, although he only obeyed the King of kings, and refused to take away human life at the bidding of any earthly monarch.

Mothers, have you no power in your hands to help on the time when God shall "scatter the nations that delight in war?"

Surprises.

ONE of the many maxims of the world is this, guard against surprises. And people try their best to do so. Much thought is expended, and many pains are taken that they may not be startled by unexpected events. We forewarn ourselves and each other, and prepare for what is coming, exercising all possible ingenuity with regard to the future. Changes, losses, sicknesses, even these things scarcely take some people by surprise, for they have always known that they were possible and even probable, and have therefore not forgotten to make arrangements for meeting them. It is scarcely possible for these people to be very much thrown off their guard. They are not to be taken at a disadvantage by a tidal wave; they had better even be disappointed than surprised. They are not to be

astonished by the sudden appearance of a fiery messenger in the clouds; they are to know beforehand that a comet is expected. No thought or trouble is too much to prevent their being surprised.

And yet we *like* surprises, and it is of no use to pretend that we don't. We have always liked both to give and to receive them—that is supposing they are pleasant ones. What makes a child's birthday so happy but the surprise of a new toy, which he finds beside him on the pillow as soon as he awakes on the eventful morning? If he knew what was coming, would it be half as delightful? And would not a pleasure which comes to him later lose both for himself and his friends at least half its delight if he expected it? Everybody knows that when a man's services are suitably acknowledged, whether the testimonial consist of an address beautifully written on vellum, or an addition to his household treasures, or a well-filled purse, he must on no account be able to omit the important words, "I am so entirely taken by surprise, that I—excuse me," &c. It is true, indeed, of a great many things that they would lose half their value if they did not come unexpectedly. Well-merited praise is sweet, but anticipated praise is almost certain to prove a failure. Success, joy, love that is counted upon has not such power over us as that which flashes upon us unexpectedly.

And so, notwithstanding all our preparations and efforts at guarding against surprises, we often get them. Sometimes they are very startling, and we cannot be otherwise than alarmed at the grim and threatening apparition that suddenly appears before us. But far oftener, even as we love best to astonish our children with pleasant surprises, so does our Father deal with us. We have the full-blown joy without waiting while it buds and opens; we have the broad noon-tide of delight without the grey preparatory dawn.

And may we not hope that at the end of the life which is tended by such inexhaustible love and care we shall find many more happy surprises? It would be hard to say what we really do expect. We cannot but look forward, and, looking forward, we cannot but speculate a little. But it is not likely that we shall find all our surmises very incorrect? May it not be that the pale face which will

look into ours, and which we expect to appear so cold and strange that we shall shrink from it with awe and trembling, shall prove to be the well-known and familiar face of a friend? Death an enemy? It may be a father, a mother, a sister; it may even be the Saviour Himself. And it is very certain that heaven will contain many surprises for us. It will be probably altogether different in locality, in appearance, in the occupation of its inhabitants from what we have dreamed. And especially may we not hope that we shall be gladdened by the sight of some whom we scarcely dared hope to see?

"They died and made no sign." But who knows what passed between the fear-stricken spirit and the near and yearning Redeemer? Who can tell but that they who looked so late to the Saviour of the world may have been surprised to find themselves safe in heaven? It may be that when we look at our lives and the lives of others, as a whole, we shall be astonished to find how much unnoticed "goodness and mercy" they had in them.

Any way we may hope, and trust, and be quite content to leave everything to our Father.

Left Alone.

GRIEF is often accompanied by querulousness. The sad, and especially those suffering bodily pain and weakness, are tempted to be slightly self-important and unreasonable, and not a little impatient. Plenty may be said in extenuation, for hearts already sore may not be expected to be able to bear much, and therefore, when unwise, would-be physicians only make the pain greater, and harsh reprovers preach long sermons to the weary, it is indeed no wonder that the one cry breaks from the white lips, "Oh, leave me alone, and let me try to find rest and peace." There is surely some excuse for us, when, weakened and worn, we long for the quiet which we cannot find, if we desire then at least to be left to ourselves.

But have we always this excuse to urge? Do we not often desire to be left alone when really we have neither sickness nor sorrow to bear? We cannot help being fond of pleasure and ease, and impatient when others would take them from us. Gourds are pleasant things, and the withering of them is very trying to the patience. We spend our time in building snug little resting places, full of comforts and delights, and is it likely that we shall cherish amiable feelings towards those disturbers of our peace who break our quiet with trumpet-calls of duty, and burst open our doors, letting in the cold air, that we may perforce look out into the night, and seeing stern armies fighting by the light of the stars, grow uncomfortable and ashamed of our own indolence? We get angry with these irrepressible instructors, and their unpopular insinuations. We do not want to be reminded of the battle of life, or the needs of the people, or the work of the world; we only want to be left alone. We hear of mountains to scale, and crowns to be won, and victories to be gained; but heights are difficult, and crowns are heavy, and victories are costly. Let those gain them who will; as for us, we will be left alone to enjoy peace and quiet.

Do not too many of us feel thus? We dislike being disturbed and roused and invigorated; and the truths that "This is not our rest," and "Here we have no continuing city," are very unpalatable ones. Ah! but we have reason to be profoundly grateful that we are not left alone as we wish. It is well for us that there are voices that will not be silent, accusing spirits who will not be denied. Conscience, circumstance, the providence of God, losses, disappointments, personal afflictions, all these are monitors that will not leave us to ourselves, but will speak out great truths in our hearing, whether we wish to listen or not. Our querulous cry, "Leave me alone," is altogether disregarded, and if nothing avail to rouse us into action, then the nest is stirred up, the palace is blown down, the trees are stripped of their sheltering leaves, and we are fain to go forth into the world active, if not brave—dogged, if not eager.

And, whether we recognise it or not, the fact is that this is one of the many blessings for which we should give thanks to God. To be left to ourselves would be a great

calamity, one of the greatest that could befal us. It is not only that our work would be undone, that the right would lose a supporter, and the cause of good be less prosperous. That, indeed, would not be of great moment, because truth and goodness shall be triumphant, whether we choose to be idle or diligent. The loss would be to ourselves: we should miss the blessing; we should become poor and miserable. There is no joy in idleness, no luxury in stupor, no delight in self-engrossment. It is unnatural to be quiet and dreamy, for God gave us energies and strength and skill, as well as work to be done. And, however we may talk about wishing to be left alone, there is that within us all which is dissatisfied with an existence that is not active and full and complete.

Oh! whether our days be many or few, let us *live* in them. Let us not be angry with disturbing influences, for they are God-sent, and come to us laden with mercies. We cannot see their wings; our eyes only discern the unlovely robes in which they are disguised; but they are angels nevertheless. Let us thank our Father for them, and pray that, whatever may happen to us, we may never, never be left to ourselves.

Unattained Desires.

In an omnibus, which late at night was carrying to their several destinations quite a load of weary men and women, was a pretty, healthy-looking child, with her widowed mother. Her bright face presented such a contrast to all the other occupants of the vehicle that she received rather more than her share of glances and attention. But the child, in no way discomposed by these, grew sleepy, as it was natural she should do, seeing that her usual bedtime was long since past; and even the efforts of her mother to interest her in the objects they were passing failed to keep her from closing her eyes and nodding.

Next to the child sat a woman whose face was even more

worn than the others, and who looked in that crowded omnibus the very personification of loneliness. She looked at the child wistfully several times, edging a little nearer now and then until at last the little tired head dropped on the shoulder which was invitingly near, and, apparently finding it comfortable, rested there contentedly. Instantly a light, which was almost a glory, flashed into the woman's face, and transfigured it with the marvellous beauty of joy. The lips, which had been hard enough before, quivered, and the eyes first brightened and then filled with tears, and though the woman tried to control her emotion, she was evidently very deeply moved. At length the mother, seeing the child leaning against the stranger, tried to remove her. But in a tone which was almost piteous in its entreaty, she begged her to desist.

"Pray do not waken her. She is tired, and I am quite glad that she should rest against me."

"But she will weary you?"

"Oh, no, not in the least. Pray allow her to remain."

"You are very kind;" and the mother, contenting herself by holding one of the little hands, said no more about it. But the stranger's face did not once lose its look of joy. She was no longer tired and lonely, and old and miserable. She forgot all her trouble as she watched the child who was not her own, but to whom the woman's natural tenderness had turned so spontaneously; and once surreptitiously, when no one was looking, her arm stole round the little form, and she pressed her faded lips for one moment to the red, tempting ones of the child.

Bless the children! Are they not almost angels in this sorrowful, sin-stricken world? The woman had probably plenty to make her sad; but she was certainly made brighter and happier that night by the little incident in the omnibus.

Does it not seem a pity, seeing that there are plenty of children in the world, that this woman should not have a few, instead of one of those women who vote "children a bore?" What a capital mother she would have made, who had in her heart so much love for children that it gushed up even at the sight of a little stranger!

But there are plenty of people in the world besides her, whose dearest wishes are unfulfilled. There is many a man

who all his life thinks how delightful it would be to be in fair circumstances, with a competency that would enable him to live comfortably, and satisfy his generous heart by helping the needy, who never gets beyond poverty after all. And there is many another who cares nothing for wealth and honour, but who has ever a longing for a home-life, with some one to care for and to share with him the peace of a "domestic paradise," who never gets what he wishes; for one whom he loves dies, and another changes, and all things go wrongly with him, until he gives up that dream, and tries to be content with his more undesirable lot.

But what shall we say about these things? Are they mistakes or failures in the direction of Providence? No; there is this to say:—If all desires were granted, the world would be much worse than it is. There is work to be done, which can only be well accomplished by those who have "hearts at leisure from themselves," who have no strong personal ties, who have found that in this world their dearest desires will never be fulfilled, and who are content to have it so if they may be of use to others. Therefore, if any are mourning over unattained desires, let them be of good courage. It is better to be useful than to be happy; and if they may not be the one, it is perhaps only because they may the better be the other.

Opinions.

It is impossible, and it would be undesirable, to go through life without forming our opinions upon the circumstances and persons associated with us. We must think, for even sluggish minds are aroused sometimes, and though our hands should be idle our minds may be constantly busy. And it is an undeniable fact that every one has a perfect right to his own opinion, whatever it may be. He may believe what he likes, even though sometimes he had better not give expression to his

beliefs. Not that there is any law in our own land to prevent his doing that. The "good old times," when men were fined and imprisoned and burnt for not thinking to order, are past, and so long as no evil consequences ensue no one is punished for holding a particular idea.

We are in these days exceedingly quick to take advantage of this liberty. Opinions are as plentiful as the stars. It is wonderful how many thoughts can gather around one object, and how diversified they will be! We are told that there will come a day when we shall "see eye to eye," but it seems as if that day is a long way off as yet: at present we see each thing in every possible light, and it is evident that opinions, whether of persons, places, or events, are very chameleon-like.

And yet it matters a great deal what we believe, and it is very important that our opinions should be just. For they cannot long be kept secret. We cannot help giving expression to them in actions and words. They influence us in everything; we are what we believe. Our ideas are the motive-power which moves heart and hands and tongue. If that be wrong, all is wrong, and we cannot be right in anything. Our opinion is the index to all that is within us, and when we have honestly declared it, eyes of ordinary penetration can read us like a book. If we have holy beliefs, faith, hope, love will rule our lives. If our thoughts are clean, to a great extent our words and actions will be pure also. We are too apt to think that it is of very little consequence what we believe; but seeing that it influences all our lives, and through us many others, we cannot feel too strongly how important it is to form right opinions and to judge righteous judgments.

Are we not a little too fond of forming *bad* opinions upon people and things? There are at least two sides to everything, and the darker side seems to be the favourite. How seldom do we hear really generous opinions of individuals! In all places where persons are talked of there are detractors, but those willing to speak good words of their neighbours are very hard to find. It is the same with almost every subject. What sombre views of life, that is of their own personal experience of life, people take. They say, gloomily, that they would not

live it over again for all the world. It has been so dark, so dreary, so utterly desolate, that they would have you believe there has been no joy in it. There are few whose opinion leads them to say heartily, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."

Then it is wonderful how one-sided almost all our opinions are! One idea is adopted by us, and all the thoughts that others bring must be wrong, we say. And perhaps this conceit, which is mostly exhibited in highly self-opinionative persons, might do no harm besides making them very narrow and bigoted if they kept their thoughts to themselves; but as at all times they are eager to express them, there is no doubt that much mischief is done, and many minds are unsettled and thrown into confusion that would otherwise have been at rest.

Let us, then, be careful what we think. Opinions which are of such importance should not be, as they too often are, hastily formed. And since so much depends upon them, let us pray for wisdom not only to speak and act, but to think aright.

Led.

We cannot but feel, in our best moments, a kind of gladness as we sing the pilgrim's song, "He leadeth me." It is sweet to be led. It is pleasant to be relieved of all care and anxiety, and to feel that we have put our hands into those of a trusty guide who knows all about it, and who for very love of us will choose the best place for our feet. There is still so much of the child-nature in us that we sometimes feel very clinging and dependent, and as if the worst thing that could happen to us would be to be left to pursue our journey alone. We are apt to get frightened in the dark, and to start at sight of suddenly looming dangers, and to be quite afraid of climbing precipices and leaping chasms. And even when the way is smooth and plain, and soft winds are blowing, and the warm sun is

shining, we feel that it is good to have a companion to whom we can say what is in our hearts, and who will speak back to us just that which we most long to hear.

Only the worst of us is that we are so apt to be discontented with the path. When we have walked along a little way with satisfaction we do not like to turn corners and go into fresh roads. We look up at our guide with very questioning eyes, and are far too prone to say, "No, no, not that way: the other is the right." As if we knew!

How would you, yourself, act in such a case? One comes to you and says, "I do not know a step of the way. It is all new ground to me; I have never been here before. Do you know it? And will you show me?" "Oh, yes," you say, "I know it perfectly. I have conducted people through it thousands of times. Come with me, I will guide you." And you go together, stopping now and then to rest or to admire the beauties of the way, while you do everything to ensure the safety and pleasure of him who says he has committed himself to you. But if frequently during the journey this stranger stops to cavil and question your knowledge or wisdom, if he declares himself unwilling to go through some paths which you know lead the right way, and particularly desirous of entering others which are full of danger and in a wrong direction, how long will your patience last? When for the dozenth time he demurs, would you not leave him to himself?

"I thought you said you did not know the way. But if you are so much wiser than your guide, choose for yourself. Go where you please, only do not again ask me to direct you."

It is a blessing for us that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. He is patient still, and bears with our murmurings and rebellions in the wilderness, and still leads us forth by a right way, not dropping our reluctant hands, but holding them still until we again feel glad to have Him near, and clasp His strength, rejoicing to find it made perfect in our weakness.

But we should not complain so much, and we should treat our Guide better if we knew Him well. For then we should more completely trust Him. As it is, we are afraid to give up ourselves entirely into His hands, though

that is the only safe thing to do. We are timid about unseen paths, and want the light to be always shining. We want to know what the way is like before we have been through it, and thus indeed we are like children who cry for impossibilities. We ought to be content to know, as we do know really, that it is most certainly the right way. Some treasure lies in every path through which our Guide leads us. In one path it is strength, in another experience, in another wisdom, in another joy. He is not leading us about aimlessly, of that we may be very sure, and also that though the paths seem to be very winding, they are the nearest way to the celestial city.

Oh, since we cannot but be glad and thankful to be thus led, let us leave off grieving our Father by our discontented spirit, and go gladly on until He shows us first the white towers, and then the open gates, of our Home.

Being Happy.

If at any time it might be expected that everybody should be happy, it is surely when warmth and beauty are upon the earth. Because nothing is more contagious than joy, and there is so much of it in the world, that unless we shut ourselves up in a very inner chamber indeed, we are certain to get a little of it. "The time of the singing of birds is come," and everything seems to be awakening from dreams of sadness to a time of light and gladness. Every created thing around us seems to be singing the same song, "Thy beauty has made me glad." Thousands of flowers lifting up their eyes toward heaven sing it. The fruit trees blossoming into new life, the hedges with their multitudes of beauties, say it. It is sung in the secret shades of the wood, where birds and bees make melody. And it is the wordless thought of many a weary heart which rejoices in while it wonders at the beauty of the world.

Sometimes, indeed, there seems to be quite a delirium

of joy about. We cannot watch the sky-lark go up into the deep blue, and hear the wonderful songs he drops down to us without thinking of the "drunken lark." Is he not mad with pleasure? He is so happy that he cannot control himself, and so he goes on singing, and careering, and still ascending, until we poor plodders down below are compelled to either wish we could be beside him, and have a share in his bliss, or slightingly wonder what he has found to make such a fuss about!

But really one cannot much wonder at the lark! Do not some of us feel very much the same? We have only to take advantage of the early sunny days, to stand upon some hilltop, and look down into the valleys below, covered with the beauty of bud and blossom, and wonderful sunlight, to feel as if it would be good to be larks, that we might sing too, or at the least boys, that we might toss up our caps and "Hurrah!" in order to relieve our pleasure-burdened hearts. There are some moments full of ecstasy, moments that in a measure atone for months of sorrow, moments in which we seem to come thirsty to a fountain and drink our fill of joy, and such moments must surely come to those who are privileged to look upon the wonderful beauty of God's world.

And yet, strange to say, we meet as many sad-looking faces now as at any other time. It is borne in upon us, however we may try to resist it, that, after all, the world is not so full of joy as of sorrow. It is true the earth is passing beautiful, that on every side there are sights to make the heart throb with delight. But it is also true that it takes something more than grand scenery to make our happiness. Sometimes indeed the blessed sunlight seems only a cruelly blinding brightness, and even the scent of flowers overpowers us with faintness, and, turn which way we will, there is nothing but the crowding together of most unsatisfactory things. In our hearts is something more to us than mountains and rivers, and the pain there can never be healed by any number of beautiful pictures.

What, then, shall we do that life may be a happy one? Oh, if there are those who are sick, and sad, and so weary that they do not care even to look upon blue skies and green fields, let them know that there is something else provided for them. There is a Friend whose love can

satisfy, there is a rest even here for those who are tired out by the troubles and perplexities of life. Let them only come to Jesus, and trust in Him; let them once feel themselves safe in His loving arms, and they will find that it is indeed the spring-time with them.

And are all Christians really happy? Let them stand forward, that we may see their faces and judge for ourselves. Ah, there is too little likeness between them and the birds and the flowers. They do not keep their eyes upward; they do not let the sunlight abide upon them. How is it? Jesus said, "Come unto Me," and they have come. What business have they to labour and be heavy laden, when He has given them rest?

It is because they do not abide in Him, because they are not always looking unto Jesus, nor always coming to Him. When the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing in His wings there cannot be darkness, there must be summer.

Oh, let our life be glad *because we spend it with our Saviour.*

Things that are Taken.

"WHY has He taken it away? I should never have had it if He had not given it to me." This is the thought that comes unbidden to us all at some time or other. It is so strange, we think, that we should be called upon to give up the very things which we are certain came from God Himself. Even although we may be kept from murmuring, we cannot help wondering when we find our hands so empty that were so full, and know that our treasures have been stripped from us in love as tender as that which enriched us with them at the first. It is mysterious; and when we have puzzled ourselves trying to solve the problem as to the reason for such experiences, we can find only one answer which has any power to quiet us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord."

So many things are taken from us as life wears on that it is almost strange that we do not get more used to the discipline, and learn to hold our pleasant possessions with looser clasp. But it seems so much more natural to receive good things than to give them up again when they are taken, that it requires a very long time to master the lesson of really glad and contented submission. What we need to feel, and what we may all most certainly feel, is that our Father is doing it, and therefore it must be well, and that, instead of leaving our hearts and homes empty He will assuredly give us far more than He takes away.

It is not pleasant to have our comforts taken, and to miss just at the time when we fancy we need them most the solaces and enjoyments of life. And yet how many have this trouble among others. The things that were so good and seemed indeed almost necessary are taken away. Why? May it not be that when these earthly dwelling-places become less bright and cheerful we may look forward with a greater longing to the home above?

It cannot be other than a sore trial when health is the thing that is taken. It is so good and enjoyable to feel strong and free from pain, to be able to walk about with elastic step, and clear eyes, and leisure and inclination to take in all the pleasure that can be derived from the visible beauty of the world. It is a very sobering thing to feel the constant pressure of sickness, and to be always languid, and anxious, and feeble. And yet health is one of the things that is surely at some time taken from us, making us sad with the contrast of former and present times. He must have received grace from God who is able to give up this treasure into His Father's hands with a smile. For we never know how precious health is until we have to give it up. It is a blessing that "brightens as it takes its flight;" and to resign it cheerfully just as its sweetness is felt is very difficult. And yet it is wonderful that it can be, and often is, thus yielded without a sigh or a tear. It must surely be because as health goes the Physician Himself supplies the loss, proving His ability to heal the sick of whatsoever disease the sufferer has in a higher than a literal sense, and making Himself so precious that the change is felt to be a very good one.

Few things are taken whose loss we feel so much as

human love. Friends abound in youth, but we do not make so many new ones as the years go on, while from many causes and in various ways the old ones pass away. We miss them painfully; we do not like the feeling of poverty that comes over us as we look into their empty places. God gave us love, and we delighted in it, and now He gives us instead loneliness and the longing for the old smiles and the names by which we used to be called, and the hidden affection which spoke through word, or look, or touch.

Perhaps our wonder is the greatest when the thing that is taken is our ability to be useful. We loved so well to work for the Master, and He gave us some to do; and when we felt that it was progressing the most He took it away, and left us feeling sad and useless. But we have this thought to comfort us even in this—it may be that He is only giving us rest before He commits to us better, higher, more glorious work.

There are indeed many things taken away, and they are those which we loved the best and held the most precious. And yet we should surely be very thankful that we have had them so long, and say as one has beautifully written—

"He gives us what He finds our souls too poor in prayer to ask,
He gives us, lest we sink in sloth, some gracious overtask;
He takes away the boons He gave, and why I know not yet,
But this I know, when most He takes, I'm deepest in His debt."

In Darkened Rooms.

A LITTLE child was once left alone to amuse himself as he might. It was in the spring, and the time of the day was noon. The sky was cloudless, and the bright clear sunlight streamed through the windows and flooded the room, and the child rejoiced in the strength and beauty of the light. But presently in his play he discovered the shutters, and after variously moving them contrived to

close them, and in doing so of course shut out the brightness and filled the room with darkness. Then he grew uncomfortable and frightened, and began to cry, until his parents came and again let in the light.

It was just the action of a foolish child, we say; he cried for the light, and yet there was plenty of it to be had if with his own hands he had not shut it out.

But the child, foolish enough no doubt, was quite as sensible as his fathers are. There are thousands of people who are supposed to have arrived at years of discretion who live in darkened rooms simply because they have themselves shut out the light. They do not like the change; they grumble if they do not cry, they are uncomfortable and vexed if they are not frightened, and yet if they had only been wise enough they might be living all the time in sunlight instead of gloom.

Those who walk about the world with observing eyes see very frequently when people are closing shutters. How often the young who are growing up into life, and who love the light, are making it impossible that they should hereafter live in it. They wish to have a good old age, to live many years in comfort and health, and enjoy the evening of life. But they are wasting the morning. Instead of being diligent and prudent they are idle and extravagant. Instead of working now that they may rest then, they are allowing the golden hours to pass unheeded and unimproved. They are young and strong, their hands might be made swift and skilful if they chose; but all that they seem to be doing is closing the shutters and shutting out the light.

Health is joy, but how many are by their own acts preventing themselves from enjoying it! Habits of self-indulgence, which are in direct opposition to all the laws of health, are being formed, and become so strong that they will shortly gain the mastery. And then? Oh, then it will be very dark, and the mistaken creatures will mourn in their sufferings and discomfort, feeling all the more sad because they will remember that they themselves shut out the light whose absence they regret.

How many people there are in the world who feel lonely and friendless. How is it? Are there no spirits who could respond to theirs? No other hearts that could give

sympathy, and love, and even help? If not, at least there are plenty to whom sympathy, love, and help would be great blessings, and who would gladly give in exchange for them very sincere gratitude. But very often lonely people have themselves darkened the rooms in which they live. Some time or other they had the opportunity of winning friends, but they have been cold and repellant, they have spoken hard, harsh words, and the hearts that were turning to them, and would have clung to them, making the whole earth more beautiful for their sakes, have been alienated for ever. Some rooms are very dark, and sad spirits inhabit them, but they have themselves shut out the light.

How often a life is darkened by sin. God makes His sun to shine, but wrong-doing brings only darkness. Is it not mournful when the spring comes with its sunlight and joy, and all is hidden by the thick wall of remorse that keeps the soul in gloom? If people only knew in time what terrible penalties have to be paid for breaking God's commandments, they would surely be more careful not to do so.

We close the shutters, but it is good to know that He "who delighteth in mercy" can open them and let the light in again. No soul is so dark but that He, the Light of the World, can send all the shadows away.

"Save me from mine own undoing" is a prayer that the Lord will hear, and though we have made our own night He can give us the morning of joy.

Sometimes indeed He sends the night. We are in darkness, not because we have excluded the light, but because He has done it. Then it matters very little. All the nights that need trouble us are those of our own making. As for the others they are perfectly safe. Even the last that shall come will be very short, and then we shall hear a voice: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and *Christ shall give thee light.*"

Jesus Only.

TELL them of Him—always of Him. You are never weary of that name, neither will the people be. There is music in the very sound of it. It will fall upon their hearts as none other can. If you want them to be tender, tell them of Jesus, for He will teach them how to love; there is no tenderness like that which is learnt at the foot of the cross; there are no hearts so soft as those which are moved by the Saviour. If you want them to be truthful, and honest, and upright, tell them of Jesus, for there can be no meanness, or prevarication, or deceit in the souls which He has made His own. If you wish them to be noble, and brave, and self-denying, tell them of Jesus; for if they learn of Him they must be greater and nobler than anything beside in the whole world could make them. Oh, tell all to whom you have the opportunity of speaking much of Jesus.

> "Nor heart can think, nor tongue can frame,
> Nor can the memory find
> A sweeter sound than Thy blest name,
> Oh, Saviour of mankind."

Yes, tell your friends of Jesus. The years are swiftly passing on. Those who are with you now will leave you soon. Those who make you so glad with the bright beauty of their youth will very soon have to go forth to the battle of life, in which it may be they will become soiled and stained and injured. The lips so ready to smile now will be drawn and white with pain, the unclouded eyes that dance and sparkle now will become dim with tears, the hearts that are bounding so joyously now will soon be heavy with care and sorrow. And then? Oh, then, none but Jesus can do them good. Then they will turn away from all the friends and pleasures of time, and one only cry will come from them, "Oh, that I knew where I might find *Him!*" Tell them now. Set Him so plainly before them now, that when that time comes they will know where He is, and how they may come near to Him.

Tell them of Jesus. Tell them so often, so simply that they cannot misunderstand. Tell them earnestly and lovingly, too. Let your own hearts speak. Tell them what you have found Him to be. Tell them how the same Friend, the same Saviour may be theirs. There will come a time when in sorrow and loneliness they weep because there is none to pity and none to help, a time that shall make them grow rapidly old and worn because of suffering, a time when for them there is no light or gladness anywhere, nothing but darkness, and dread, and despair. Tell them of Jesus now that they may remember Him then, and turn to Him who says, "Come unto Me; him that cometh I will in no wise cast out." Let them know Him as the "Light of the world," and the hope of all who trust in Him.

Tell them of Jesus. They have sad sights to see those who are now so blithe and gay. They will watch the light fade from faces that they would fain have hidden from the destroyer. They will stand at the open grave, and see forms that were unutterably dear to them put down into the narrow bed, while upon their shrinking ears fall the words, sadder than any funeral knell, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Oh, lest their hearts should break with sorrow, tell them of Him who says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

There will come to them a season more solemn than all the others, when all the things that they have been used to will become indistinct, and pass away, and they will be summoned to meet the eternal; when they will stand on the shore of the river of death, and hear the roll of the dark waters, and feel a power urging them on, while they cannot see whither they are going. What will they do then if you have not told them about Jesus? How they will start back and shudder and lift up helpless hands in vain if they do not know the Saviour! But if they know Him and love Him they will not be afraid to die. They will stretch out their eager arms to Him, and cry even with the last breath, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Tell them of Jesus. Who should if you do not? You

were weary, and He gave you rest. You were heavy laden and He took your burden. You were thirsty, and He gave you the water of life. You were lonely, and He came to you, and loved you, and was your friend.

Unreasonableness.

THERE have always been unreasonable people in the world. We have them to-day, as our fathers had before us. Indeed, it may be that we are all more or less unreasonable, if not in one respect then in another. Most of all are we so in our wishes. It is quite wonderful how each wishes to appropriate to himself all the good things he can get, and how earnestly he desires and even prays for many things which if he were reasonable he would know he cannot have.

Of course there have been people before us who have done the same. "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldst do for us *whatsoever we shall desire.*" No doubt! Plenty of people feel the same, though some are a little more modest in their speech! If persons said these words now, in the presence of many others, what polite raising of well-bred eyebrows there would be among the listeners! James and John must be hardened indeed if they would dare to say such a thing in this present year of courtesy and refinement. For true etiquette prefers others before itself, and is not anxious for the best places and the most enjoyable things.

Only we must remember that this most unreasonable request was spoken to the Master. "And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John." They saw the indelicacy and the unreasonableness of the spirit which their brethren exhibited. But the patient, tender Saviour knew how to rebuke lovingly, and so teach without wounding. And though the disciples were justly indignant, He was, as ever, merciful even to their faults.

But, though we naturally side with the ten, are there no times when we are just as unreasonable as the two? Is it not the fact that in our private prayers, heard by no ears but our Master's, we silently make requests that we should be ashamed to offer publicly? Do we never preface our prayers with some such great demand as "We would that Thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire"? Are we not utterly selfish in our demands? Do we never ask —not only for best places, but best everything else? For ourselves and friends, is anything too good in our opinion? Are there not whispered prayers which steal up to heaven as if they had no business there because our own hearts condemn us?

It is well for us that our Father is as wise as He is loving. He knows what to give and what to withhold. And though we feel that it must be pleasing to Him to hear His children cry, it must be good indeed for us that He does not always give what we ask for. Why should we have all the best of everything? Do not others deserve and need it more than we? He takes all the arrangement of our lives in His hands, and though He often says, "Ye know not what ye ask," we can but feel that whether He gives or denies He deals with infinite tenderness where His children are concerned. We do not live many years before, in the fresh light that gathers about us as we grow older, we see with what foolish petitions we have besieged His throne. And one of the things for which we should praise Him now, and certainly shall praise Him when we reach home, and are full-grown and wise, is that He has not given us all we asked for. "Ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss." Whenever He says this to us our hearts should go out to Him in greater love and trust than ever.

We have learnt that it is not safe to ask for everything we think we want, but we have never yet learnt that this prayer is unsafe—"Father, Thy will be done; Father, glorify Thy name." If He will answer this prayer—and He will, in us, by us, and through us, if we really ask Him —all shall indeed be well with us.

Doing Without.

In this world we want many things that we cannot have. This disappointing state of affairs is met by different people in very different ways. Some are soured and spoiled; they think of little besides the treasures for which they long, and allow the blessings they possess to sink into insignificance beside those which are desired. Others far wiser and happier yield their wills to circumstances. They cannot have what they wish for, and so they make themselves happy without.

There is no doubt but that this ability to yield cheerfully to what cannot be altered would do as much as anything to lighten the load of life. Thousands are miserable simply because they are discontented. And they are so not because the necessities of life are denied them, but because they have not certain things which,—if they did not so wish for them,—they would be just as well without as with. The age we live in fosters eager desires after certain possessions difficult to attain, especially those of wealth and pleasure. Men and women spend, and are spent, in this strife; and, if they fail, as so many do, they think life itself is scarcely worth the having. If only they could keep their desires under control, contentment would take the place of disappointment, peace would succeed to struggle, and rest to feverishness.

The real worth of a thing is just the value we put upon it. In a room of a certain nobleman's mansion is a marvellous collection of china, antique, rare, and almost priceless. Many a lover of such treasures has lost himself in admiration of the beautiful specimens of the art of many countries and many times which are gathered together there, and has felt more than a little envy and sorrow that he has not the same means of gratifying his taste as has the owner of that room. Once some children, with their friends, were inspecting the house. A little lady, aged about eight, upon entering the "china room," glanced round very indifferently, and, seeing the plates, cups, and basons which were placed about the walls, said, "*I suppose this is the kitchen!*" and passed on to more

interesting subjects. The kitchen, indeed! As if those plates and cups were ever used for purposes of eating and drinking! Everybody smiled at the child's mistake; but one could not help wondering whether any person were the better or happier for a more discriminating taste.

"If ignorance is bliss, 'twere folly to be wise."

If our capacity for admiring beautiful objects only causes us to be dissatisfied because we cannot possess them, is that capacity such an enviable quality, and does it render us as really superior to other people, as we in our vanity like to think?

But it is not necessary that we should be either ignorant or lacking in refined taste in order to be submissive under deprivation. A little common sense and true philosophy, built upon trust in God, are all that are essential to teach us that needlessly difficult lesson of *doing without*. A man passing a morning at an exhibition of pictures, sees one that strikes him very forcibly. It is a splendid painting, every inch of it is perfect, and the subject is one that appeals to the heart of the gazer. He longs to possess it: he would never be tired of looking at it, it would always be a valued treasure. Well, if he can afford it he has a right to buy it. But if he cannot, what should he do? He should walk away to look at the next picture, and so forget if he can his desire. But even if he cannot forget it he should not allow himself to be made miserable by its absence. If he be a sensible man he will remember that it is not necessary either for his health or happiness. He can live as well and be as merry without as he could with it, and all he has to do is to submit to going without what he cannot get. It is the same all the way from a a large fortune down to a new hat. Nothing really matters if only we can bring our minds to quiet submission and yield to circumstances, or (which is the better way of putting the same thing) to the kind and unerring will of God.

Paul was very far advanced when he said, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." We wonder how long it had taken him to get to that happy condition of mind. No doubt he found the lesson hard to learn, but we may be very sure that it was worth all the

cost to get it perfectly. We are in the same school as that to which Paul belonged, and have the same teachers. Cannot we learn too? It is really worth while to try. The cares of life would not vex us, nor its disappointments fret us. We would be calm whatever came, and not only calm but happy. Surely if we look up and say, "*Our Father* who art in heaven," we mightly gladly, or at least submissively, do without what He in wisdom denies us.

Cups of Cold Water.

Of course, there are plenty of people who, when they wish to give, are not restricted to cold water—wine, tea, anything you like to ask for, is at their disposal.

But that is no reason why we should hide away our pitcher and cup, and sullenly feel that because we cannot do much, therefore we will not do little.

Besides, is not a cup of cold water very often more valuable than a cup of anything else could possibly be? And who shall say that he who has only that to give is not as much a benefactor as he who has so much more?

We often hear a remark uttered in tones of gratitude, not unmingled with surprise, "Ah, he *is* a grand man, he possesses both the *means* and the will to do good, and it is well when they go together."

But really they always do go together, or if not then it is certainly the will, and never the means, which is missing. Some people are foolish enough to envy others.

"If I only had his abilities and opportunities, how much good I would do!"

Well, we cannot exactly tell what weights and measures are used when good works are tested, but we can remember the widow's mite, and we can guess that the rich man who subscribes his hundred guineas to some charitable institution is of very little more use in the world than the poor man who works hard all day and gives a couple of hours every evening to the instruction of lads whose edu-

cation has been neglected in consequence of their having been sent to work as soon as they had attained the age of five years. If you are a gentleman you can send a cheque to the Missionary Society; if you are a poor man you can invite your neighbour to come from his comfortless room and take a seat by your fireside while you tell him what you have learnt of Him who came to give peace, and joy, and rest to the weary and heavy laden. If you are a lady you can send a plate of savoury food or a bunch of grapes to the suffering invalid, and if you are a poor woman you can re-make the hard bed, and brighten the dark room, and quiet the crying baby. And who shall say which gift is the more acceptable?

Let none of us try to persuade ourselves that we have not the means and the ability to do good; we have any number of cups of cold water at our disposal if we only have the will to distribute them.

It is not possible to decide as to what gifts are in themselves the most valuable. It depends so much upon circumstances. You may give a man a sovereign, and it may happen to be the thing he was most of all in need of. Or you may take his hand in your own, and give him a few hearty, kind words, and they may be more precious and more fruitful than silver or gold. There are moments in life when the earth is barren and the scorched sands are intolerable, when the lips are parched and life is nothing but a fever, and then a cup of cold water is of priceless value. There are days in life when the heart is faint and weary, and the pain and sorrow are almost too much to be borne, and then the touch of a loving hand, the memory of tender words, and the glance of wistful eyes full of sympathy are more precious than anything else in the wide world. Oh, do not hesitate to give the cup of cold water; it looks weak, and common, and almost valueless, but there may be strength, healing, ay, even salvation in it.

"If I only had the ability I would do good." Oh, say not so. If you are young, how much light and joy you can bring to hearts that are old and world-weary. If you knew what gladness you can make in dark places, if you understood how your very presence and light, cheerful speech have power to turn evening into midday for those

who love you, you would not be so wholly occupied, even with your own happy life, as to forget to do your part.

And if you are old, your wisdom can teach the inexperienced such things as shall prevent them from suffering and disappointment in the future.

Whoever and whatever we are, we can surely do something. If we have, indeed, nothing but a cup of cold water, let us give it gracefully and lovingly, "in the name of a disciple." Let us be

> "Content to fill a little space
> If God be glorified."

No Letters!

THE longer we live the greater respect we must feel for our forefathers and foremothers. What wonderful people they were to be sure! They were not always discontented and grumbling, they had placid faces and unruffled tempers; they spoke cheerful words in a cheerful tone; they loved and hoped, and laughed and sang; they ate and drank, and walked and enjoyed themselves, and yet there was no penny post, and often a whole month passed without bringing so much as a single letter!

Talk about the repose, and self-control, and heroism of the present day; why they are nowhere in comparison with those wonderful qualities which our great-grandparents must have possessed to have enabled them to bear their deprivations in anything like a Christian spirit. If we contrast their power of endurance with our own fretful, impatient eagerness even alone in this matter of letter-receiving, there is nothing for us to do but hide our heads in shame.

For who does not know that it is almost more than modern human nature can bear to be quiet and dignified while waiting for a letter? How slowly the time goes, how the hands of the clock creep towards the hour at which the little black and white messenger is due. How

difficult it is to settle to anything, no matter how much there is to do, until it has come. With what feverish eagerness we anticipate its contents, one moment bright with hope, and the next full of fear. What a thrill we feel as we hear the double-knock of the postman at last. How impossible it is to feel at peace although we may remain outwardly unmoved, and how difficult it is to speak in an ordinary steady tone.

"Letters?"

"Yes, but there is none for you."

What a painful feeling comes in the place where hope sojourned but a minute ago! How cold and cheerless the day suddenly becomes! What dense clouds pass over the sun! How rapidly the light vanishes from room and face and heart! How dreary the day looks in which we must live and work and do our duty generally without the dear words upon which our eyes longed to feast!

It is a very common occurrence after all. Everybody knows at least once or twice in a lifetime what it is. But that does not make it the easier to bear. Some, no doubt, can bear to hear the words, "There is no letter" with calm, unruffled feelings. They did not expect any. Or if any had come they would have been business-letters only, and neither very important nor very interesting. Or, perhaps, "No news is good news," the best that could possibly come. But—

> "Every morning as true as the clock
> Somebody hears the postman's knock,"

with feelings of greater depth and excitement than can possibly be described.

The absent are often the dearest. When the mother is away, and all the house seems desolate and empty, what a treasure a letter would be! and what a void is felt when the expected messenger has not come! When one who is very dear is sick, what palpitating eagerness there is about post-time! When a son has just left to make his first venture in the world, how anxiously his letters are looked for and read! Sometimes the news is painful, but few things are so hard to bear as suspense.

What they must have suffered during the late war in this way in poor Paris! How many of us, finding our letters

on the breakfast-table, have given a sigh of sympathy, and, perhaps, something better still, at the thought of our sisters shut up from their nearest and dearest, and able to receive no tidings from them. And who, reading the short but often tender messages in the *Times*, could help respecting the family feelings, the yearnings for the absent, of which they so eloquently spoke?

While time lasts we suppose men and women must still bear the crushing remark, "No letter." And all that we can do is to try and be as patient, and enduring, and satisfied as possible.

Anybody could tell whether we are great or little by the way in which we are able to bear that reverse. If we console ourselves with work, and speak just as gently to those about us, and still wear a cheerful face, we are not so bad but we might be worse. If we are sullen, and miserable, and impatient, visiting our wrongs or disappointments upon the unoffending, then the less that is said about us the better.

And yet there is one other thing we can do. We can see that by our prompt writing of letters that are required of us we do not subject those who care for us to the pain with which we ourselves are so well acquainted.

Joy.

THE newspapers are pretty full of sad stories. But it is doubtful if even in these times anything more painfully pathetic has been recorded than the tale told in the following short paragraph:—

"A poor widow woman of the name of Bell residing in Marylebone died from over-joy on receiving ten shillings out of the poor-box. She exclaimed, 'God bless the good gentlemen!' and fell back dead."

Death from excess of joy is most likely rare enough, but the remarkable thing here is that the gift of ten shillings from a poor-box should have produced such a

result. It speaks a great deal more eloquently than any mere words could do of what life in England in this civilised and marvellous nineteenth century is to some people. It describes, as no forceful language could ever do, what a world is this in which we are compelled for a time to live. It is called often enough "a desert," "a vale of tears," a "waste howling wilderness," but even these names are not half so condemnatory as this story of a woman to whom joy was so strange, and even a small sum of money so wonderful, that it was more than she could bear and live. It ought, surely, to make everybody rich in this world's goods stop and think. It is more eloquent, surely, than the most sensationally worded appeal to the charitable. It ought to touch us if we have any hearts at all, and lead us to use our eyes to try to find out if there are none around us to whom even without practising any very great self-denial we could give a little joy. It is harrowing to picture to ourselves the experiences of that poor woman previous to the time when she presented herself before the "good gentlemen" who were so overwhelmingly kind to her. What depths of want she must have known, what shrinkings from future privations, what dread of starvation and homelessness the poor lonely soul must have endured, before the reaction of ecstasy came. We have heard of deaths from over-joy when sudden tidings of large fortunes have been brought to men; but what a strange thing joy must have been to this woman whom ten shillings could kill!

It brings rather an uncomfortable conviction even to those who are disposed to make the best of the world, and give it to the very full all the credit it deserves. After all, notwithstanding sunlight, and warm airs, and spring flowers, it is an uncommonly hard world to live in. Very few of us, in the whole of a life-time, have a chance of being killed with over-joy. Even when we get a taste of sweetness, there is a great suspicion of bitterness underneath. When the brightness comes it is very transitory, the clouds move very rapidly, and soon overshadow the sun. For a few weeks perhaps, some of our brothers and sisters had a little gladness, for were not thousands of men going from the war-fields to the hearts that had wearied for them, and the homes that were empty and

joyless without them? But the shadows will come soon enough, as the men remember in the night the brothers whom they have slain (for no quarrel of their own) and those other homes that they have helped to make desolate for ever.

There are two things of which the scarcity of joy in the world ought to remind us. The first is, that as there is so little, we ought to do our utmost to make a little more. If only we gave ourselves to each other as Christ gave Himself to us, surely the world would not be quite so weary a place. And then, we may rejoice in the thought that this is not all we have.

"There *is* a happy land
Far far away."

And there joy is not so strange a thing. One cannot help wondering if that poor woman had heard of the city whose streets are paved with gold, and knew the way thither. If she did,—what a surprise it must have been to her when she found herself there! And what to us who still bear the burden and heat of the day when we also hear a voice, "Come up hither!"

The Old and the New.

At Conway there is a grand old house, *Plas Mawr*, which bears date 1585. It is in good repair, and is rendered additionally interesting to the many visitors who annually look over it by the quaint old furniture which still remains in it. It is one of the many objects of admiration in the ancient walled town, and no one can sit in the antique chairs or on the benches which surround some of the rooms without thinking of the bygone days, when the long halls were filled with merry crowds of gaily-dressed ladies and gallant gentlemen, who were born, and loved, and wooed, and won, and died in them. Now, however, it is appropriated to a far different purpose, for the drawing-room is used as *an infant school-room*, and the ornamented walls

have mottoes for the little ones to spell out and remember; the oaken floor is trodden by little, restless feet, and the people's children sit where lords and ladies formerly sat, while one of the rooms is actually turned into a play-place for the youngest of them.

Is not this emblematical of what is really taking place not only at Conway, but throughout our land? The old times are indeed very, very far away, and the new ones are wondrously different from them. In our day the best places are being given up to the young life, and many things are being done to train the children for the important posts which any of them may have to occupy. And is it not well to think that the power is not to be put into inefficient hands? Our children are not to grow up ignorant; they are to be made observant, thoughtful, and, as far as may be, conscientious. There is a great future before them, which is not to be confined to kings and nobles, but in which the poor man's children, now gathered in infant-schools, shall take a great and important part. And we cannot but be glad to think that before this time comes they are being made, so far as they can be, good and strong for the work.

It is very possible that those Conway children will be all the better for their experiences in Plas Mawr. We do not wish the spirit of progress to crush out the love of poetry and romance. Surely there is room enough for them all. And if we had the training of those little ones we would tell them fascinating stories of those other days in which those grand old rooms were so differently peopled. It is a great thing for a nation to have a history even such as ours, which we all know might have been better. But even out of the failures of our fathers the children may learn many a good lesson which shall sink into their hearts, abide in their memories, and bring forth fruit in their lives. And there are heroic deeds to teach them about, great things accomplished, greater still attempted, and grand words spoken which linger until to-day. It is not only the castles which remain as monuments of the good works done in the past. It may be said of most things that we now enjoy, "Other men laboured, and we are entered into their labours." But we wish to say just this one thing for the children. It is well to teach them

reading, writing, and arithmetic. And perhaps it is also well to teach them how to earn and save money, and increase in riches. But that is not all that they should learn. All refining influences should be brought to bear upon them, and they should be *all* taught to become gentlemen and ladies in the best sense. Is there not rather too much hardness in the world? Would not a little more softness and tenderness be an improvement? There is also too much selfishness, and not enough care for the claims of others. Let us teach our children to be chivalrous and courteous, brave and gentle.

We think it is good that in our infant schools, even where no sectarianism is allowed, the principles of Christianity are early taught. In the grand time coming, among the new men and women, if Jesus be known and loved there will be far better days in the future than have ever been known in the past. Education will do much; but let it be remembered that beside Christianity even that is a small thing. If the children are to be really great and good men, let them learn greatness and goodness at the feet of Christ.

Climbing.

MAN is a climbing animal. Let whoever doubts it watch the young at their play. Running along on level ground is very well, but it is poor sport compared with that of mounting. Only let the opportunity come to a playground full of boys for a trial of climbing skill, and see how eagerly they will avail themselves of it, and how rapidly they will be doing their best to excel each other. What a boon is a long, strong pole well fixed in the garden-ground! What convenient things are street lamp-posts! Only let there be a clear course with regard to policemen and other persons in authority, and a little audience of envious boys and admiring girls, and what a delightful sensation has the heart of the boy who has succeeded in

reaching the top and placing himself about the lamp. And what fascinating things are rooks'-nests! So bewitchingly and tantalisingly high, so out of reach, and yet so provokingly tempting are they, that a boy needs to pull his cap over his eyes and run out of sight to escape them. And if the tops of trees seem to be crowded with beckoning hands, what are the tops of mountains? Who has not felt that

"Hills draw, like heaven?"

Who has not toiled on, and on, higher and higher yet, weary and footsore it may be, but still resolutely determined to gain the top if possible, and utterly unable and unwilling to disregard the cry *Excelsior* which is spoken by varied voices.

But why should it be so? Why is climbing so pleasant an occupation? Is it curiosity to see the view from the top which lures the boy up? It is not so much that, everybody knows, as the desire to excel his fellows, and gain a greater height than they can hope to reach. It is the spirit of emulation that makes people climb.

But what a world full of climbers this is! Everybody wants to get above everybody else. To be first, or at least higher than their neighbours, seems to be the great desire of the people. If we could only read what is written in invisible ink we should find this resolution, "I will surpass my fellows," in very strange places,—in the shop of the tradesman, in the counting-house of the merchant, in the drawing-room of the lady and the dressing-room of the maiden, in the study and the studio, and even the pulpit and platform. With some natures indeed it seems as if life is one perpetual climb; and some hearts are full of eager unrest because they have not yet attained all that they wish. To be first in society, first in popularity, first in wealth, first in position, seems to be a craving from which there is no escape, and so people climb on and on in weariness and failure, although they might certainly know that they will die before they reach the top.

Is it necessary? Is it worth while? Half the heart-burnings of the world are caused by this. With all our climbings others get above us; and therefore we are jealous, and envious, and unloving, and miserable. Does it matter so very much as it seems? Could we not be

more content with the side of the hill, or even with the valley, than we are? It would save a good deal of strength, and some pain and disappointment. It is possible to be just as happy lower down as are those at the very top if people would only believe it. It has its uses, no doubt, this climbing mania, but it has its abuses too; and it may be that these outnumber those.

There is a climbing, however, which will pay for the toil. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but *I follow after*, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and *reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark* for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

There are no heart-burnings after this climbing, for this Excelsior there is no after regret. Every step of this upward way is bright and glad, and at the summit there is heaven.

Stars.

THEY are only little points of light to us, whatever they may really be. Even if they are great worlds, with mountains all Andes, and rivers all Amazons, and inhabitants all giants, still to us they are just little drops of light, placed in the deep, dark skies, to make our nights less dreary. And small as they are, and comparatively insignificant, when compared with the sun and the moon, still we would part with a great many things rather than our stars. They are such bright, beautiful little things, we are never tired of gazing upon them. And it is something to be able to look at them at all. The sun is quite too strong for us, unless indeed we choose the times of his weakness—his morning infancy, or his evening old age; but the stars are never so bright as to dazzle us, and the longer we look at them the more we love them.

And they have their uses, these stars. Not to speak of the sentiment they inspire, of the tender thoughts they invoke, of the delicious sensation experienced by those who know that "other eyes" look at the skies, and see the gems of light, there are plenty of reasons why we should value these lesser lamps that God has hung up to cheer us. Those who have had a long journey on a dark night have known what it is to give thanks to God for the companionship and aid of one of those bright eyes. Those who have stood trying to pierce the unfathomable darkness, when the skies have been inky black, and the host of waters, foaming and tossing, have been heard, but could not be seen, know how even the light of a single star changes the dark and sullen face of night, and makes it often like the countenance of a relenting friend. How often, when things have been against us, when head and heart have been weary, and we have been almost disposed to sink into cowardice and despondency, has the twinkling of the stars brought better impulses and stronger resolves! How often, when faith has been drooping, and hope has spread her wings for flight, these stars have looked like the lanterns of God lighting our way to the shores of peace.

If only we were half as useful as they—we who speak so patronisingly about them—if we did the good they do, we should be much better than we are. They do make the nights less dark. How many nights are any the brighter for us? Who feels any the less lonely, and desolate, and uncertain, because we are pretending to hold up our lights above them? Is there less stumbling in the intricate way? Is there less fear in timid hearts? Is there less sadness, because of our shining? How many of us are showing the way to heaven? How many of us are lights in the darkness?

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

Alas! if that is what makes us like stars, it is little wonder that we are never mistaken for lights. Dark, indeed—so dark, that we cannot be distinguished from the clouds—are many of us who ought to be bright and shining lights.

If we understood this as we ought we should be quite ashamed to look at the stars, they would be so many accusing eyes looking down into ours with their sad and silent eloquence. But if we cannot be stars we can at least press forward into the light of the bright and morning Star. We cannot shine, but He can shine upon us. We cannot enlighten the world, but we shall be less dark if His light fall upon us. We may not be able to relieve the loneliness or shorten the night for one faint and weary traveller, but we may point to Him, and thus shall the darkness be broken, and soon the day shall shine.

August Sabbaths.

AMONG the many beautiful things of the summer time is a Sunday in August. It seems to fall upon this earth as softly and as refreshingly as the dew from heaven, and to make all hearts still and glad. The sun is so bright, the air is so sweet, and there is such a look of calm repose everywhere, that all things seem in keeping with the sacred engagements of the day. Even the early morning appears different from the other mornings of the week, it is so much more quiet and restful.

> "The eyelids of the morning are awake;
> The dews are disappearing from the grass;
> The sun is o'er the mountains, and the trees
> Moveless are stretching through the blue of heaven
> Exuberantly green; while noiselessly
> The shadows of the twilight fleet away."

As the day wears on its characteristics are still more marked. The Sabbath harmonies are soothing and sweet to the tired ears that have listened long to the discords of the world.

The matins of the birds, the music of the bells, and the happy hum of voices that have leisure for kindly talk, are pleasant sounds, and hearing them the heart gets ready to listen to the better and more serious music which thankful souls sing to God.

But in order to enjoy them perfectly the Sabbaths of August should be spent in the country; as indeed they are by thousands of privileged persons who select this month, when the year is in her prime, for their holidays. It is there, in the quiet of the fields and the hush of the forest, that we are compelled to say—

> "Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
> The bridal of the earth and sky."

It is where the corn waves on the hills, and the wild flowers of the valley lift up their eyes to heaven, that Sunday is all that it can ever be in the world. That it is a day of rest the very cattle seem to know. The horses lying upon the grass, and the cows standing in the water that is shadowed by some tall tree, look full of lazy enjoyment. The bees work, and the butterflies play as usual; the clouds float across the skies, and the shadows creep over the fields; but to our eyes who watch, nothing seems to work wearily, and all things seem to be resting.

How good it is, far from home, to enter some little village church or meeting-house, and join in the simple service. There is a feeling of strangeness, it is true, and our thoughts may at first wander away to the sanctuaries where a constant attendance makes all things familiar; but presently we feel at home after all, for the hymns are the same, and sometimes the tunes are old favourites. Always the well-known words from the Holy Book are very sweet to the stranger in the strange place, and hearing them, and feeling a certain sense of loneliness in being separated from his Christian brethren at home, he will scarcely help lifting up his heart wistfully to the Father who is ever present, and saying, "Be not silent unto me, O Lord." The sermon may be very different from those to which he is accustomed, but so long as in some form or other the old, old story is told, nothing matters much; and the plain building, very cramped and small perhaps, often seems very near to heaven.

It is so pleasant to sit in church on an August Sunday with the doors and windows open. The fresh air comes in and fans the faces of the worshippers, and helps to make them vigorous and interesting listeners; and the air is so sweet with the scent of flowers, so different from the

air we have to breathe in the close hot town, that even inhaling it is a pleasure. Sometimes, and this is better still, the service is held in the open air. It is a very different thing from standing at a street corner to sit on the grass in an orchard to listen to the Word of God. There is a service held during the summer months upon the Great Orme's Head, and those who have attended it are not likely to forget the impression it makes. Everything is quiet, and fresh, and high. Down below the sea is rolling, and the sea-birds are skimming over the waters. The congregation sit and kneel among the graves, and the litany of the Church of England sounds sweetly beautiful even to the most uncompromising Nonconformist. The hymns, too, are sung as from full hearts, and

"Jerusalem the golden"

almost brings the tears into the eyes of those who think how near the holy city may be to them. It is easy amid such influences to believe that "*God is Love.*" It is so evident, indeed, that faith is scarcely necessary, and we feel like little children as we say, "Our Father, who art in heaven."

Wherever they are spent the Sabbaths of August are blessed. And when the night comes it is with thankfulness that the closing hymn may be sung—

"The air was full of Sabbath song,
And Sabbath beauty robed the earth;
There was no flaunting, fine-dressed throng,
No marring and unseemly mirth,
But golden sunlight in the dells,
And music of inviting bells.

"The house of God was everywhere;
We stood in courts where He had been,
We walked across His meadows fair,
And down His aisles of evergreen,
And stayed beside His river brim,
While all our hearts went out to Him.

"We lingered where the little bands
Knelt down together in His light,
With sunburnt faces, toil-worn hands,
And simple hearts that loved the right;
And while we breathed His holy name,
Into our midst the Master came."

The Departed.

THE departed—for so we always speak of our dead—are the happy ones who have outstripped us in the race, and reached home first. We speak of them in whispers, though we know that our voices would never waken them now, since "*He* giveth His beloved sleep;" and we speak of them in sorrowful yet half-envious tones. We miss them terribly at first, indeed it seems as if we cannot get on without them, but we feel that they have indeed the best of it who are so safe and blessed. It is well to be them, say we who are still left behind. And while our hands and heads are busy we catch ourselves looking up, and almost believing that if we had keener eyes we should see the happy family who are at home in our Father's house. We listen, too, with hushed breath and eager spirits, and fancy that we hear the music that in their rapture they cannot help pouring forth; it comes to us very faint and low, but then perhaps it has a long way to come. So we comfort ourselves as the days pass on, and sometimes it seems as if they have scarcely departed after all.

There is a question—asked by Miss Ingelow in her poem, "Supper at the Mill"—which, in various ways and at different times, must be asked by almost everybody—

> "Is there never a chink in the world above
> Where they listen to words from below?"

It seems so natural that there should be something of the kind; and, whether it be so or not, we cannot help wishing there were. There is sure to have been something left unsaid which we very particularly wish to say, and something that we did say that we long to unsay, or at least to be pardoned for saying.

> "I spoke once, and I grieved thee sore!
> I remember all that I said."

And it does seem hard that our intercourse should be suddenly broken off, and there should be no more communion.

There is no doubt but that the books that have lately been written, whose aim is to prove that heaven is more

homelike and human than we have thought, and that our friends who have departed are not nearly so far away from us as we feared, are very comforting. The opinions expressed in them may be strongly objected to by many; all kinds of things may be said against them. But when the smiter has smitten us sorely, and death is no longer a vague thing that does not very closely concern us, then we begin to want something which shall help to decrease the distance between the two worlds where we and our loved ones live. If we may believe that, after all, they are not really gone, that sometimes, at least, they come to us and help us by sweet though silent influences, a good deal of the bitterness of parting is taken away.

What is meant by the phrase so frequently used—"Ripening for glory"? Does it not mean that we have noticed that the lives of our friends have been less earthly, more like what we supposed heaven to be? They did not realise that they were drawing near the end of the journey. They had no prescience of what was before them. They entered into their daily work as heartily as ever. Their hearts were not weaned from their friends, but rather seemed to cling to them more tenderly than ever. And yet there was a difference. Gradually, and quite unconsciously to them, the Saviour became more precious, and their home above more distinct. And, in consequence of this, there stole over their faces, almost imperceptibly, another look, and into their conversation another tone. And this cannot be said to be the result of affliction always; for when death has been sudden, without any warning, we have seen it the same.

Does it not seem as if the dwellers of that other world had come down and begun the communion, so that the newly-arrived ones should not feel like strangers or guests, but like children at home?

After all, it is perhaps better to leave all that our Father seems to have hidden from us. They are not, for God has taken them. "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

"Why mourn we? Oh, we would have kept them, we say,
From the cold of the winter, the wind and the rain.
To have looked in their faces each desolate day
Would have brought back the sun in its shining again,
And chased away pain.

"But the Father knew best. And since some must be first
In that quiet home-shelter beyond the blue hills,
We are glad to be chosen to suffer the worst
While they are quite safe by the heavenly rills,
Where God's perfect joy thrills."

Love Tokens.

We have different ways of showing love: but is it not true that no ways seem so strange to us as those which our Father in heaven uses? It is the difference between human and Divine methods. His love, so much truer and stronger than ours, can bear to do much that we never could.

We love, but we make mistakes. If we remember all that we have done and wished to do for our friends, we must see how often, had we been wiser, we should have acted very differently. But He who sees the end from the beginning, and whose love is as great as His wisdom, does not have need to repent.

One thing would we not do if we could? Would we not shelter our nearest and dearest from the troubles of this life? But "*whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.*" We would cry, do often cry, with all our hearts that the smiter's hand may be withheld, and only the Healer appear. But it seems as if He did not hear, so persistently do the strokes fall. We hold up our hands to ward off the blows; we lift up our arms, and would fain spread them out over the heads of our beloved; but He will do as pleaseth Him; and, what is more, He will make them see that His way, not ours, was the best. It seems so strange to us, but we cannot understand it; but we know our Father, and we should trust Him. They, even when the pain and sorrow of life are upon them, often unconsciously rebuke our want of faith. They are not afraid of what His hands bring to them.

"While many sympathising hearts
For my deliverance care,
Thou, in Thy wiser, stronger love,
Art teaching me to bear—
By the sweet voice of thankful song,
And calm, confiding prayer.

"On Thy compassion I repose,
In weakness and distress;
I will not ask for greater ease,
Lest I should love Thee less.
Oh, 'tis a blessed thing for me
To need Thy tenderness."

Is not such an experience as this so good a thing that it is worth purchasing, even by sorrow? And yet how many of us would be willing to allow it if we could by any means prevent it?

For ourselves, perhaps, we have lived long enough to know the mercifulness of sorrow. The discipline of life has not only been necessary, it has been very, very blessed. We can see what we have gained by it in the days that are past; and therefore even for the future we would not be without it. But we cannot feel the same for our friends. We are afraid of grief for them; we cannot bear that sorrow should come upon them. We cannot resist the feeling of regret with which we see the storm gathering, but it is only because we are weak and short-sighted. It is well for them, and well, too, for us, that our Father is stronger in His love than we. They would never grow in grace, would not become perfect if it were not through suffering. Let us try to be content to leave even those who are nearest and dearest in our Father's hands.

Truly our love-gifts are different from His!

"What would we give to our beloved?
The hero's heart to be unmoved,
The poet's star-turned harp to sweep,
The patriot's voice to teach and rouse,
The monarch's crown to light the brows:
He giveth His beloved sleep.

"What do we give to our beloved?
A little faith all undisproved,
A little dust to overweep,
And bitter memories, to make
The whole earth blasted for our sake:
He giveth His beloved sleep."

And what is there that is really better than rest and sleep? Let us be glad that our dearest ones are still dearer to our wise, and tender, and loving Lord. We can never, with all our trying, make our love what His is to them. We may load them with gifts, and feel that we would fain offer them our very lives, and yet it may be that nothing but sorrow will come to them from our love. We may be as good friends as it is in us to be, but we are frail, and imperfect, and often unfaithful. Let us be content to take the second place in their hearts, that Christ may be first. Let us leave them to their Father, and ours. And as we see His love-tokens given to them, let us say, "I will trust and not be afraid."

Clouds.

As, on an average, six or seven tenths of British sky is daily obscured by clouds, we have exceptional opportunities of watching and admiring them. Indeed, although we are not blind to their beauty, we are rather given to exultation when they are altogether absent. If we are describing any special occasion, such as an excursion, a boat racing, a review, or a wedding, the most important part of the description, the crowning touch, the climax, is sure to be "And the day was beautiful; we had an almost cloudless sky." That we rejoice at cloudless skies, and complain at cloudy ones, is only a proof that we may have too much of even good things. For that clouds are good who can deny? What would happen to our plants and to ourselves if they did not supply moisture? Are they not the sources of springs, lakes, and rivers? And do they not moderate the sun's rays and make the hot summer days delightful?

In November, of course, we cannot be expected to admire clouds. But in August they do appear marvellously beautiful. When we are out and about, making holiday, and feasting our eyes upon the loveliness of nature, we lose

a great deal, in more ways than one, if we do not often look up. The sea is very grand when the silver shimmer is upon it, or the frothy waves are tossing themselves upon stern rocks. Fields of green grass or white waving corn are pleasant pictures; and the hush of sombre forests is full of repose. But the sky is often more magnificent than anything beneath it, and to lie upon the greensward in the shelter of a tree, and watch the changes among the clouds, is about as tranquillising as any occupation in this world. Clear eyes and a little imagination are all that are necessary. We look up and see mountains and peaks covered with snow, cliffs and ravines, plains and valleys. We watch them for a few minutes, and then close our eyes for rest. When next we open them the scene has changed; there are hosts moving to battle, receding and pursuing armies, and silent gatherings from all parts of the vast field. Again the pictures shift, and now there are castles with battlements and towers and domes, the foundations hidden away in mists, the tops bright with glittering silver. It is even easy to recal the wonderful words,—

"Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels."

We may all enjoy the clouds, even although we know nothing about *cirrus*, *cumulus*, and *stratus*, and never think to puzzle ourselves as to how they are all held in the atmosphere. But we cannot enjoy them unless we have what Mrs. Stowe's hero called "the faculty of observation." Unless we accustom ourselves to looking closely at and into things the beauty of the clouds is very likely to escape our notice. But it is not only when there is something marked and peculiar either in colouring or formation that the clouds are worth looking at. They are interesting, graceful, and grand on almost every summer day and night.

There is no lack of cloud poetry for those whose tastes incline them to recal it. Joanna Baillie says of a summer cloud, that it is

"As though an angel, in his upward flight,
Had left his mantle floating in mid-air."

Shelley writes most musically about the cloud, and its mission—

"I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers
From the seas and the streams;
I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
In their noon-day dreams.

"From my wings are shaken the dews that waken
The sweet birds every one,
When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,
As she dances about the sun.

"I wield the flail of the lashing hail,
And whiten the green plains under,
And then again I dissolve in rain,
And laugh as I pass in thunder."

Quite as beautiful, if more serious, is Wilson's well-known sonnet—

"A cloud lay cradled near the setting sun.
A gleam of crimson tinged its braided snow."

It will not do, however, to linger too long in cloudland. We soon are reminded that life is like a very cloudy day, and that in it we could do with a little more sunshine. Let us not be too sure of that. Too much light is blinding and bewildering; we cannot bear it. It is well for the natural world that clouds should temper the radiance and heat of the sun: may it not be just as well that our world should often be in shade, and our sky be overcast? We ought not to be as vexed as we are when the sun is darkened and the clouds return after the rain; for surely we know enough of Him who "bindeth up the waters in His thick clouds," to be sure that He will let no harm come to His children. And as we take our eyes from the clouds and look down to the earth, where our work and our burdens lie waiting for us to take them up again, let us be thankful for the shelter and refreshing which even clouds may bring.

Not Wanted.

Some doubts have been expressed as to whether childhood is after all the happiest time, but there can be no doubt at all but that it is a very foolish time. For then in our

ignorance we are fretful and impatient about many things which in after-life we would give not a little to recal. Is it not one of the troubles of children that they are always, as they say, "being wanted?" When they are busily engaged in a most important game, at which they do not wish to be disturbed, what shadows are apt to creep over their faces, which are most suddenly and mysteriously elongated at the sound of the words, "You are wanted." They don't want to be wanted. They desire to be left to themselves and allowed to continue their game.

There comes an after-time when they would be only too glad to hear the familiar words again, when one of the sorrows of life is that they are not wanted. The world goes on very well without them, it does not concern itself in the least about their affairs, whether they are ill or well, happy or miserable, or, indeed, whether they are still in the land of the living or have taken their places among the silent dead.

And this consciousness is at the root of a great deal of loneliness and pain. For there is no harder thing in this hard world than to feel that we are of no use to anybody, and that no one misses or wants us. There is no summer in the lives of those who live so utterly alone and to themselves. How can there be blue skies, and fleecy cloud mountains, and diamond dew-drops, and hosts of flowers, if the sun does not shine? And where love never comes the whole life must be grey and joyless. How many are there in our world whose eyes would brighten, whose hearts would beat quicker, and whose whole being would be transformed into warmth and gladness at hearing once more the old words, "Mother wants you!"

But mothers die, and friends and companions pass away. Old relationships cease, ties that were once deemed strong are broken, there are only vacant places and empty seats at the fireside, there are no loved lips to speak the familiar name, no clinging hand-grasp demanding love or help or anything that we have to give. And then?

Well even then we ought to be wanted somewhere, and by some one. It is doubtful if God ever intended us to be lonely. "He setteth the solitary in families." The families are not all of the same size, they may consist of two or a hundred persons. If He has given no very close

relationships, it is a sign that He wishes us to open our arms wide and take all the world into them. If we are not really wanted at home, we are wanted in a dozen other places. There cannot in reality come a time when we may feel that we are not needed. We may fancy so, we may be blind so that we cannot read the language of appealing eyes, or deaf so that we fail to recognise the voices of entreaty which are raised around us; but they are there all the same.

So that if any are sitting by their quiet firesides to-day, and feeling desolate and forgotten, let them be assured that they have something to do if they only knew it. Let them go forth and see if they are not wanted. Even now, at this time, so full of tender memories, and sacred associations, there is many a want that *you* can satisfy, many a need that *you* can meet.

There are weary hearts that a pleasant, kindly word may stir into hope, sad faces that you can make brighter.

You are wanted by little children who find even the early morning of their lives overcast. You are wanted by the young, who are surrounded by snares and temptations, all the more dangerous that they are not seen and cannot be appreciated. You are wanted by the sick, who weary for the sight of a comforter. You are wanted by the sorrowful, who know not where to look for joy. You are wanted by the tempted, who know not how to find strength. You are wanted by the aged, whose evening of life is very sad and silent.

Not wanted? Oh, if none beside want you, Jesus, the Friend of sinners, the Saviour of mankind, wants you to work for Him. What are you thinking about if you have forgotten Gethsemane and Calvary?

For His sake, arise, and forget your own weight of loneliness or sorrow, and make the world bright to some of the many by whom you are wanted.

Voices.

THERE is no such thing as silence. The whole earth is vocal with thousands of sounds, so that even the night cannot be still. If at times, bewildered by the turmoil around us, we steal away from the crowded cities, where men congregate, and linger where no human voices can reach us, yet there are sounds everywhere. Away in the midst of broad open fields, with nothing but God's blue skies above us, and the green growing world about us, there are still the songs of larks, thrushes, and nightingales filling the air with music. In the secret lanes, hidden away from sight between banks and beneath hedges, there is the hum of a thousand happy insects keeping silence away. In the heart of the thick forest, where, if anywhere, we may be at peace, we have soft, soothing music made for us by the gentle waving of branches, and the whispering of young leaves and flowers. By the sea, even when some solitary position has been gained, the mighty waves sing their everlasting Hallelujahs. There are voices everywhere, and the one song sung in different keys and by a variety of singers is, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever."

But when we listen to human voices, we do not find them always saying the same thing. There is plenty of complaining in our streets. And we cannot listen long without hearing even worse things than complaints. He who loves his fellow-men cannot but be often pained by the way in which the voice is used. So many are saying hard things against their Maker, so many are saying bitter and cruel things to each other, so many are spending their breath in prayer that a loving God cannot grant, so many are uttering words that they deem light as air, which shall be turned into tables of stone, and hereafter lifted up in judgment before them.

But the voices of our brothers are not always hard. Often, indeed, they are made so gentle and strong by love, and they speak such good things, that we can but thank God and take courage. They linger in our ears

and in our hearts, making music for many years. These voices raised in praise, or lowered in supplication, make the world a better place to dwell in, and fill us with strange joy. We listen for them when we are weary and sad, and, hearing them, grow hopeful again; we do as they bid us, and believe that they are sent for our guidance.

And are there not other voices full of mystery but also full of importance to us? Poor Joan d'Arc was not the only one to whom they have spoken; only she believed them, and most people do not.

"I must go to Chinon," said she to her father.

"And why, Joan?" he inquired, much startled.

"To speak to the Dauphin. *The Voices* tell me so; I must go."

She said she had had a dream—"no, not a dream, a vision, an impression, a manifestation." Well, plenty of people have had all these, and the voices have urged to even nobler things than raising the siege of Orleans and crowning the King at Rheims. A woman is led to think upon the condition of hundreds of her sisters who are fallen and miserable. She has "an impression" that they might be rescued, and made better, and even brought to Jesus, that they should become "clothed and in their right minds." It is "as if something says to her," *Do it.* Will she? Other voices speak in her heart. Fear says, "You cannot; what are you that you should try?" But Faith says, "Obey the voices, and do the work in the name of the Lord of Hosts." A large-hearted man is touched with pity for orphans. A voice says to him, "Take these children and nurse them for Me." But how? He has not riches to build houses, nor to buy food and raiment for the children. But if he believes in the voice, and listens to it, will he not find that victory is given to him? How many, looking upon the sorrows and wants of the world, hear voices in their hearts urging them to attempt great things for God and for the suffering. Only they are afraid. They have not faith; they stifle the voices. But who shall say that what a few brave-hearted disciples of Jesus have been enabled to do many might not multiply, until even the mountains of sin and sorrow should be removed from our earth?

The voices in our hearts say something else, too, that

it would be well to listen to. We have been too content to live the old weary life of sinning, repenting, and sinning yet again. But are we never made to feel that it is possible to come out of the fog into the sunlight? We read, "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." And it is suggested to us that we are not told to do impossible things, but that Jesus, who is able to save, is able to keep us from sinning if only we live lives of faith upon the Son of God.

Shall we listen to this voice? Shall we believe it, and act as if we did? Oh! however we may close our ears to other voices, let the voice of God in our hearts be reverently heeded.

Summer Snow.

"IT is snowing," said a little child, lifting her eyes wonderingly to the cloudless blue above her, and lowering them again to look at the soft white flakes which lay upon her dress, hair, and the book she had been reading. But, in truth, it was a very different thing from winter snow which covered her. She was reposing upon the long grass beneath a tree which was heavily laden with blossoms, and, as the gentle breeze moved among the branches, it shook the snowy petals over the child. At first, notwithstanding the warm air and glowing sun, she felt inclined to start up and seek for shelter; but, as soon as she understood what it really was, she said, as so many will say with her, "*I like summer snow.*"

Who could help it? No one objects to be covered with flowers, to walk upon them, to lie among them, or even to be buried in them. And summer snow of this kind is so sweet, and warm, and pleasant, that it seems to bring rest, and enjoyment, and vigorous health. Besides, we know that, though after it the trees may look less beautiful, the blossoms are only giving way to something better. They have accomplished their purpose, and now the fruit shall

come to take their places, and the loveliness of spring shall be followed by the luxury of summer. So that whichever way we look at it summer snow is a good and a beautiful thing.

But we often make the same mistake as the child. "If it be white and flaky, of course it must be snow," thought she. And we have a very similar thought about "the blessings in disguise" which come to us. It is true that we see no lowering clouds, and feel no cutting blast, but something has fallen upon our heads, and what can it be but trouble? It was a very gentle breeze, certainly, but still the wind did blow, and a shower of something fell over us, and without waiting to see what it was, do we not often feel inclined to start up like frighted children and run to our Father for shelter? It does not hurt us even when it falls the most plentifully, but then we expect it will, and allow ourselves to be disturbed accordingly. It does not feel like snow, but perhaps we might persuade ourselves that it did, if we stayed long enough.

What is it? A little pain, perhaps, which will pass away and leave us greatly the better; but we do not think that—we imagine it to be only the herald of a severe winter, ending it may be in death. Or perhaps it is a temporary darkness of spirit which seems to shut us in from all brightness and joy, so that we cannot see how blue the heavens are above us. Or it is some loss which we feel or fear, that strips everything of its beauty, and makes us see nothing but bare branches, which are in reality covered with promises of fruit. It is a change of some kind—a change which startles us from our dreamy reverie, and causes us to look up and expect, and shrink. So timid are we, so expectant of evil, though our Father is constantly giving us good, that we only look for frozen flakes when really we are having a summer snow of manna.

Why are we so fearful? Why have we so little faith? How is it that we find it so hard to believe in flowers and sunshine, though our Father sends them as regularly as the months go round? It is not that He has ever failed us. He has led us into green pastures, and by still waters; He has made our cup of joy to overflow again and again when we had feared it was empty; He has been giving us blossom and fruit year after year with unfailing

hand. Is it because we feel ourselves so unworthy? Nay, it cannot be that; for we have never deserved one of the good things He has given to us, and His gifts have ever been measured, not by our goodness, but His own unbounded love. Whatever may have been the cause of our fear, let us pray to be forgiven for our wicked distrust, and let us have greater faith in our Father. Let us trust and not be afraid even when the showers fall; let us rest contented and happy when He covers us with summer snow.

Rain.

"How beautiful is the rain
In the hot and dusty street!"

NUMBERS of people must have felt this as the grateful and refreshing showers have fallen upon places that were white and parched for the want of it. We learn to appreciate our blessings when they have been for a time withheld from us; and when to walk about is to grow footsore and weary and to run the risk of sunstroke, and to remain within doors is to suffer from throbbing heads and great lassitude, we long for the rain at which for the most part of the year we English are inclined to grumble. But it seems sometimes as if the rain could not come. Frequently there have been signs of its approach, and we have said hopefully, "Surely now we shall have some showers." But in a little space the clouds have passed away, leaving the sky blue and bright as ever. And so, when at length there came the promise that did not deceive us, when the dark clouds were cleft, and the flashes of light and peals of thunder brought with them the plenteous down-pouring of the much-coveted rain, how many hearts arose in glad thanksgivings to Him who has kept His promise, "I will give you rain in due season."

For how thirsty the earth had become. The dry, hard ground wanted much softening before it looked natural. And it was impossible to walk along the country roads

without sighing after the waters. The parched meadows, the thin grasses that seemed to have grown up as best it could without nourishment, and so far to have failed as to look most unlike the full juicy stems they ought to have presented, seem to have fainted and died of drought. Thousands of other plants could not grow without the rain, and were stunted and meagre, and almost unlovely because it would not come. But what a difference only a few showers can make! Those that fell upon the fields changed their faces in quite a short time, and seemed to put new life into every leaf and blade. Things seemed to quiver, first with eager expectation, and then with grateful joy. And as the plentiful drops came down upon myriad hands and faces uplifted to greet them we could not but think of the Apostle's words, "For the earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, *receiveth blessing from God.*" It seemed indeed that even the green things of the earth knew from whom the beautiful rain came, and tried to thank Him for it.

Are there not times when many of us feel in the same condition, spiritually, as the earth before the showers came? As to bringing forth fruit, that is out of the question. We are hard and barren, and almost dead. There seems to be no feeling nor power of spirit belonging to us, and we can only sing our wistful entreaty—

"Lord, I hear of showers of blessing
Thou art scattering rich and free—
Showers the thirsty land refreshing;
Let some droppings fall on me,
Even me."

But there is surely hope for us all. Will not He who noticed the silent earth, and provided for it, read over our longings and grant us what we need? Even now He is saying, "Prove Me herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Let us lift up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help. Our help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Let us hope in Him, for God shall bless us, and that right early.

Self-seekers.

ARE there such things in all the world as *un*selfishness and pure disinterestedness? If there are, should not we love to behold them? Would they not be refreshing sights, all the more so because of their great rarity? But where shall we look for them? In love? Is there anything more selfish than that? Love is never content without appropriating all to itself. Looks, words, deeds, must all be contributed. Besides, is it not very nearly true that a great deal of love of self is mixed up with love of others? Why do we love our friends if not that they may love us? And why is affection such a thing of joy, unless because it is also a delicate compliment to our own manifold virtues?

Shall we look for unselfishness in good deeds? Alas! when the hungry are fed, it is not always out of pure charity alone. Is there not a little self-glorification even in that? Better than the praise of others is the approval of our own hearts. More dangerously sweet than the flattery of on-lookers is our own good opinion. And therefore who can say that even benevolence is disinterested? To give is a pleasant thing to ourselves as well as to the recipient; and there is a selfishness in giving.

Shall we look for unselfishness in the profession of religion? Some seem as if their only care were to be quite safe themselves. Heaven, say they, is a happy place, and we are going to it. But they give no word of invitation to their fellow-pilgrims; they feel no anxiety as to the thousands who are in the wrong path, and can therefore never reach the land of light. They wrap themselves in a comfortable garment of peace, but it does not seem to disturb their serenity that those round about them are shivering and naked, and beaten by the tempest. Do they imagine that the home to which they go is "cribbed, cabined, and confined," and that there is only room for themselves and a few of their friends? But God's thoughts are not like theirs, and surely selfishness and self-seeking cannot be pleasing in His sight.

But what a universal disease this selfishness is! We all

have it in some form or other. Some more, some less, but all a little.

And there is no doubt that, when regulated and kept in proper control, it has its uses. But let us pray to be kept from being wholly self-seekers—from looking at everything as it affects self, from putting self before right and justice and humanity, from being so devoted to self as to have no enthusiasm, no feeling, to spare for others. Of only One can it be said that "He pleased not Himself." We cannot attain to that height, but we may try—we may faintly copy, we may ask Him to teach us.

Ah, when we think of our imperfection and sin, is it not good to have a hope that one day, and in a better state, we may really be made a little like our Master? And is it not possible that we may begin to acquire it now? There is such a thing as fighting against evil, and resisting temptation. We need not be conquered by selfishness any more than by dishonesty. We need not let it rob us of our greatness or our usefulness. Only let us pray for grace to enable us to watch for the indications of the bad spirit, and to crush it when it is manifested. The best cure for selfishness is Christianity. How can the followers of the self-sacrificing Lord be selfish? If we spend more time with Him, and think of His goodness and glory, instead of our own excellences, it will be much better for us.

Sufficient Hands.

It seems to us that we can scarcely utter a better wish for ourselves and our friends than that which is found in Deut. xxxiii. 7, and which is part of Moses' blessing of Judah, "*let his hands be sufficient for him.*" For these our times are so full of work and activity, so crowded with need, so clamorous with cries for help and calls for labour, that no doubt many of the pressed and over-driven workers in the great field of industry feel that their hands

are not sufficient for them, and that to do all that is demanded of them they require, not one, but several pairs of hands.

One of the most uncomfortable reflections upon the part of our life that is gone, is, that we have not done nearly all that we would have done, and indeed ought to have done. And yet it has perhaps been a very busy life — a life of hard work and perseverance—a full life, made so by incidents and events and successful toil. It may in reality have been better than the average, have seen more attempted and more done, and yet it has been to some extent a failure. Who of us, looking back, feel satisfied with what our hands have wrought? Who can regard the past time as perfect? Who does not feel it to be a necessary prayer, "Let my hands be sufficient for me"?

How many there are who, at the beginning of a year, as soon as the holiday-keeping and merry-making are over, realise with a sigh that they must go back to the work that is waiting in accumulated quantity for them! The strain has been loosened a little, there has been a temporary armistice, and the weapons have been laid aside, but as soon as the ringing of the bells has died into silence the arms must be taken up again, and the watch and the struggle and the fight must be recommenced. It is, emphatically, an age of long toil and short repose. If he would keep his ground every man must strive, and exert himself to the utmost. Many are feeling this to-day with regard to their businesses. A little relaxation of care and persistence soon tells. There is nothing for it but to strain every nerve, and keep on straining, or be content to fall back. There must be no giving way to indolence or even to weariness. And feeling this, and looking at the work to be done, there is need to pray, "Let our hands be sufficient for us."

But besides these things that are personal and secular, there is other work that our hands find to do. Who does not feel a very intense desire to do something for Him who has done so much for us? If we have failed in earthly things, how much more have we failed with regard to things of higher import? There are actions, and thoughts, and feelings, that we would be glad to blot out

of the past if we could; our hands have done too much, in some respects, it may be. But—

"When I come to the things that I left undone, then there will be more to say;
When we ask for the broken hearts that I cheered, and the tears that I wiped away;
I thought of myself, and I wrought for myself, for myself and none beside,
Just as if Jesus had never lived, and as if He had never died."

If this is the sad record of the past it is certain that we are full of desires to be more faithful and earnest in the future. We think of multitudes of mourners who need to be cheered, of hosts of weary and disappointed ones to whom we could bring hope, of the young who need guiding, of the old who require to be cherished, of wandering feet that need to be brought back, of perishing ones who might be pointed to the living Christ and have their fear of death taken away. There is so much to do that all should help. Many hands are necessary if the work is to be done. We would like to take our share, but how can we? Already our hands are full of work: we can scarcely get through what has to be done for ourselves and those who are the nearest to us. What shall we do but pray again, "Let our hands be sufficient for us"?

For this is a prayer that God will answer. There are some people in the world who accomplish so much of every kind of work that we can account for it in no other way than that He who wrought the miracle of the widow's cruse of oil helps them. And He can help us too. He can give us such power and such skill that, without neglecting any usual task, we shall yet be able to do much extra labour.

Dear friends, God give you all a very happy, because it is a very useful life. May He make your hands sufficient for you, so that good and acceptable work may be eagerly commenced and faithfully finished. And if before long they should be over-tired, and God should give them rest, may it be the happiest experience of all.

Eyes to See.

If it is necessary to pray, "Let our hands be sufficient for us," it is also needful to unite to it a companion request, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." It is true that in order to meet the demands made by life upon us, it is essential that we have ready, quick, skilful hands, but it is quite as essential that we should have keen, observant, penetrating eyes. For we cannot do what is needed unless we see the work. It is a great thing to have a desire to be active and useful in the world, but the desire is of little use unless it be followed by exertion, and it will not be unless our eyes are open to observe, and we can see both what requires to be done and also how we can do it.

There is much sorrow and pain that might be removed, if people who have willing hands only had observing eyes too. There is good and important work for Christ and His cause all around, and yet there are many earnestly desiring to be useful who are doing nothing. They expect to receive an angel-given mission; perhaps they look for the tasks which they are to perform as if they must come from a distance, and have some special manifestation to accompany them; they do not know that those who would most efficiently do the work of the Lord must just quietly and patiently *do the work that lies nearest to them.* There are opportunities of usefulness for every one who loves the Saviour; and every one who has been healed by Him has the ability to do the work. Only let us believe this, and life will not pass without some really good and valuable service having been rendered to the Master. Let us pray, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

It is pleasant to dream of doing good things. It is easy to accomplish great works in that way. We can sit by our fire, and think and picture until we feel altogether disinclined to do more than imagine. But none of us would like to waste our lives so. The way to succeed in what we dream about is to begin at once, to see what needs to be done, and then, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

There are plenty of young folk, strong and eager, and

very much in earnest, who are longing to be useful, who are saying, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? Lord, give me some work for Thee." They do not choose for themselves what it shall be; they are not anxious to have it easy, or pleasant, or profitable; it is enough for them that it is *His*. And yet they stand and do nothing, but pray and long. If the Master speaks to them, surely He says, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" There is plenty of work waiting to be done, only they cannot see it; they have need to pray, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

If they had sight, such as all who aspire to work in the Lord's vineyard should have, they would see about them in their homes, around them in the streets and alleys, those who need them. If we could speak to these young workers we would say, Oh, lose no time, ask Him who is the source of all wisdom to open your eyes, that you may see the tasks which He has prepared. And do not strain your eyes for the distant view, and overlook the near. Here, where you are now, where your life is passed, there is work. You are needed. Use your eyes and your hands for Him. Remember what He said, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." You are to be in your family, among your friends, at your work, and in the world, what He was. And this revelation of Him among men will be the means of doing more than you could imagine to promote the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

May we all have eyes to see, and hearts to understand, and hands to perform His will. May this life, among whose busy scenes we have entered, be filled with good and successful labour for the Master. And that we may let no important work remain undone, because we do not see it, let us pray, "Lord, that we may receive our sight."

Our Teachers.

It is rather an unfortunate thing to be a learner just now. Solomon says, "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety." There is also great bewilderment. Of course it

is better to be safe, though puzzled, than to be left to our own ignorance and devices, and the same wise man says, "Where no counsel is, the people fail." But still, it is rather difficult to be taught when everybody is teaching at once. Time has been when wisdom dwelt with instructors, who were few, and modesty with the instructed, who were many, but now, whatever may have become of the wisdom, learners are few and hard to find, and the teachers are increased a hundred fold. And we can scarcely wonder at that, for people naturally choose the easier and the pleasanter occupation; and though it may need great gifts to make good teachers, greater gifts still are needed to make good learners. And who is going to sit at another's feet, when there is a chance of his getting somebody to sit at his own?

Still, there are, happily for the world, if unhappily for themselves, a few learners left. If we listen very intently, we may catch, during the pauses of the general clamour, a half-stifled, but struggling cry or two—"Lighten our darkness." "What is truth?" "Who will show us any good?" And by this we know that there is still a remnant of those who are willing to be taught, and are eager to be scholars that they may be rightly educated. They have not yet been able to deceive themselves, and are less self-complacent than their fellows in consequence. They cannot persuade themselves that they are on the top of the ladder, and, therefore, entitled to cry, "Come up," to others, because they know that at present they are only upon the very lowest rung. The shadows are so thick about them, and unfortunately they realise these shadows so strongly, that it has not occurred to them to declare with loud voice and assurance that they are in the broad light of the day. They know themselves, and, therefore, are content to be merely searchers, and so they lift up their timid voices of inquiry if haply some might bear an answer.

And then? Then begins their trouble. Then indeed they need steady heads, wonderful ears, and not too sensitive hearts. For they have scarcely expressed their desire for instruction before a thousand voices are raised at once, and they are absolutely pelted with wise words. They want light, do they? Then they shall be dazzled

with skyrockets. Then they shall be surrounded by them. They want to know what is right and what is truth, and there are plenty to tell them. They shall be inundated with floods of it; and, indeed, if they are not good swimmers, they shall be absolutely drowned in it.

A learner, pure and simple, is a blessing unto many. Let him but express his doubts, and he sees what joy he has created among multitudes. Eyes grow bright, voices are raised, and an army of pens prepare to instruct him. He is attacked from all quarters, and all are eager to tell him what he ought to know. Everybody, indeed, is happy but himself. As for him, he probably experiences the sensations of a feather between several currents of wind. He is blown up and down, and round and round, east, west, north, and south. What can he do? By dint of wonderful power, he separates one voice from the others, and listens to it. It seems to be a voice of wisdom; and he carefully treasures up its directions, and prepares to act upon it. And then, with a feeling of relief, he allows himself to listen to another. And as soon as he does so, the seeker after knowledge is warned and convinced that the first teacher was wrong, and the only thing to save him is to listen to the new-comer. With patient regret for lost time, he does his best to unlearn the wrong and study the right. But before he has reached any state of efficiency, a new light bursts upon him, and he sees that that also has been a mistake. Poor scholar, what sinkings of heart, and aching of head, and general bewilderment is his portion! It is little wonder, and he is not so much to blame, if, in desperate need of a haven of some kind, he catches hold of a little bit of something, and so resolves to leave the poor persecuted minority of learners, and join the great majority of teachers.

The worst of it is, that, every single soldier in this wonderful army is fighting in a different way, and for a different end. Each speaker in the bewildering chorus of "I am right, I have the Truth," means something different from his brother. Who shall decide between them? Who shall show us what is really wisdom?

There seems but one safe thing to do. There is a Teacher who does know everything, and to Him may all learners go. "That which I see not, teach Thou me."

Promises.

In the spring we can see and hear an abundance of promises. The land is full of them. Wherever we lift our eyes we can see the old familiar characters which delighted our childhood, but which are just as full of joy for us to-day as they were then, and which tell us the same prophetic story of beauty and delight. Perhaps there are few days that so touch our hearts as the bright February ones; and may not the reason be that they convey to us so many promises which are certain to be kept? Although we have not ceased to look for the storm and cold of winter, though every morning before the sun has lighted the earth we feel constrained to brace ourselves up for a possible display of frost and snow, still we cannot walk abroad without seeing the promise of far different scenes. Everywhere our eyes are gladdened by multitudes of bursting buds, and young tender leaves. Down among the withered stems of the last year there is fresh young life, a brighter green, a more vivid beauty. Modest, nestling violets, quite hidden away in their warm beds of old and young leaves, cannot help betraying their whereabouts by their own tell-tale sweetness. Timid and fragile primroses are lifting their pale faces to the greeting of the generous sun. Daisies are opening their eyes, and the celandines have been already a long time awake. Delicate snowdrops and golden crocuses, and dozens of other flowers, beautify our gardens. The hedges are covered with constantly-growing buds of beauties yet to be. There are signs of life upon the trees. The elms are rich in clusters of blossoms, and the willows have hung out a host of floating banners to welcome the approach of spring. Everywhere, among the insects, and the birds, and the winds, and, better still, in our own hearts, an anticipatory joy is arousing us, and we eagerly receive and welcome the promises of the spring.

Because we know they will be kept. We are trusting to what has never betrayed our trust, we are looking for what we are certain to see. We may have fits of temporary despondency and impatience; we may even say, "If the

things really intend to grow, why do they not move on more rapidly?" But in our sane and sober moments we rely without hesitation upon the promises. We shall soon walk down forest paths over yielding mosses, while a thousand blossoms spring about us, and the air is full of the strange sweetness of pines and ferns and innumerable wild flowers, and musical with wonderful nightingales' songs among the cool shades of a million of leaves. We take the promises and believe in them, and show that we believe in them by watching for the signs of their fulfilment; for the fact is, all these things are God's promises of yet greater joy to His children, and we never, never knew one word of His to fail.

There are plenty of other promises that people find it harder to believe in. The promises of youth are sweeter than any indications of spring. We see bright young faces constantly rippling over with laughter, but we cannot fathom the fountain beneath. We look into clear, bright eyes, but we cannot see through into the hearts. If we could, we should find an immense amount of faith in the promises which the young have seen and heard. They are just beginning to taste the marvellous sweetness of life. Joys, deeper and more worthy than anything they have dreamed of before, are opening to them; and as they take them half-timidly a voice within says, "These are only earnests; look for more down the vista of the years that are to be. Fresh flowers will bloom, new fruits ripen, and the way shall be still sunny." Is the promise credited? Certainly it is by the young.

But others say, "No. You have the best now; there is nothing more to look forward to. The spring of February is the only one for any; and the voice in your heart is a false prophet."

Are we sure of that? May it not rather be the voice of the Father in heaven, whose very name is Love? Why are we so continually damping young joy by saying that the promise will not be kept? In our own case the voice that promised us long years of happiness has not really failed. Spring came, and summer, and autumn, each more glorious than the other. And even with all our tendencies to grumbling we dare not say other than "Thou hast done well with Thy servant." There failed not aught of any

good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

Let us, then, believe all His promises. Let us tell the young to trust in the Lord and expect the joy that their hearts are looking for. And for ourselves, when He says, "The desert shall blossom as the rose," and "They that wait upon the Lord shall not want any good thing," let us not grieve Him by expecting to live in perpetual winter.

Friends in Need.

We do not live many years in the world without so frequently being brought into times of peculiar emergency and trial that we learn to look for them as we do for the snows of winter. They may not come, of course; but the probability is that they will, and so we expect them. We find it is one of the lessons which at first we are loth to learn; but while, with other good things, experience teaches us that though for the most part life may be made up of gentle sunshine and soft showers, still there are such things as lightning flashes and perfect torrents of rain. And naturally having attained to this knowledge, the next inquiry is, What friends can we find for our times of need? What sort of shelters are there for the beatings of the tempests?

We have not far to go without finding such friends as these times make especially necessary. Those who have stood us in good stead when one storm has fallen, are sure to be appealed to again, and strongly relied upon when next the need has arisen. Proved friends may be those who have walked with us along pleasant, sunny paths; but they are certainly those who have stretched strong arms around us when we have stood upon the edge of the precipice, or have sheltered us when the pitiless rain has beaten upon us.

Well, indeed, is it if we can count among the faces that smile upon us in the gladness of the morning those who

have watched by us in the night. We all have some of them, tried, and trusted, and true as steel, who could not fail us if they tried, and would not if they could. To them in our time of extremity we are certain to look. Whatever names we keep for our swallows, we do know what to give to our doves.

But friends in need are not necessarily persons. Trial is one. Often when everything goes brightly with us, and our merry little boat skips gaily over the waters, it is a time of the greatest need. We need a stern, strong hand to keep us from the rapids. We should glide on and on to destruction if we were left to ourselves. But we are not. One with a severe face and a harsh voice takes possession of us, and we receive some very rough handling. "We did not want that stranger." Ah, but we did though, for sorrow is sometimes a saviour.

Pain is often a friend in need. We did not know him when he came. We did not think he was a friend at all, but he had some glorious things to tell us, and we could not listen while the music was so loud and the joyous singing rang in our ears. Pain did but hush the noise and take us away to an inner room where we could give good heed to his message.

Oh, we think we know our friends, but we often find ourselves mistaken. We imagined them very different from what they really were; and conscious of this, knowing also that we do not always know even what times of need really are, let us love with all our hearts the One Great Friend on whom we can rely, and take the others on trust.

An Insidious Foe.

PRIDE is a very easily besetting sin. It comes to us in so many guises that very often it is hard, and, perhaps, impossible to escape it. It is an unpleasant but persistent lover; it will not be repulsed, and no amount of scorn or coldness is sufficient to make it cease from its insinuating

and encroaching attempts to gain the mastery. And the worst of it is that it is so silent and subtle that it sometimes succeeds in appropriating us to itself before we are aware of its presence. It is possible to be bound hand and foot, and yet at the same time persuade ourselves that we are altogether free and untrammelled. Pride hangs things upon us that we mistake for ornaments; it is only other eyes that see them to be heavy and unlovely chains.

So thoroughly self-deceived are we, so utterly unconscious of the power which pride has gained over us, that we are very loth indeed to confess that it has any dominion at all in our hearts. Some faults we can admit gracefully enough. "We have not angelic tempers; we wish we had, and are sorry that we have not; but it is a fact, nevertheless, that we are irritable and hasty, and easily put into a passion." Then we are not as diligent as we might be; indolence, ease, luxury, are such enticing things that we are not always proof against them. "Obstinate?" "Well, yes, perhaps we are; for when we see our own way to be the best, naturally we like to have it. But when you say we are proud you certainly make a mistake. If there is one thing more than another for which we deserve to be celebrated, surely it is humility!"

And yet perhaps pride is really the sin that most readily finds us out. We are proud of everything—of name if we have one worth mentioning, of riches if we possess any, of family if we are fortunate enough to have one, and of ourselves most of all. If we have not one thing, we only glory in another more perseveringly. A man who has not a particularly poetic temperament, but who, having an immense amount of good common-sense and practical wisdom, has amassed a fortune, is very likely to laud his own useful endowments, and call other things "stuff and nonsense." But the artist would not change with him for the world; if he happen to be poor he only the more heartily scorns the man who has not "a soul above money!" A girl, whose gift of beauty attracts all eyes, can scarcely help a feeling of self-satisfaction that she is not "a dowdy," and her sister is almost sure to pride herself upon her intellectual attainments, and be thankful that she is not "a dressed-up doll!"

Perhaps the most popular pride of the present day is

pride of mental superiority. Culture, intellect, thought, these are the things that raise men above their fellows. The testing question now is, "Has he any *brains?*" as if "brains" were everything! They are very useful things, no doubt, but so are bones and sinews, and good digestive powers. Strong arms, swift feet, true hearts, are surely of as much value as brains, only those who have the latter without the former cannot think so. Pride can scarcely come to us in any more seductive form than this, and it is wonderful how really lofty minds become its prey.

Then there is a great deal too much of spiritual pride. We see things clearer than our brothers, or think we do, and though we say, "Not unto us, not unto us," too often the puffing process goes on all the same. Many people are exceedingly proud of their humility. The words, "I thank Thee that I am not as others," though they are words that we despise and shrink from with all our hearts, are words that often shape themselves in our thoughts.

Really we ought to be very tolerant of other peoples' pride. If we have not theirs we have our own. We smile scornfully at Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the pre-eminence." But should we have any great dislike to pre-eminence ourselves if we could get it? Are we always content to take the lowest places, and see others above us? Have we no pride of heart, that we can venture to speak so harshly of others who have?

"Those that walk in pride He is able to abase." "I dwell . . . with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." Pride costs us very dear if it occupy our hearts to the exclusion of the Heavenly Guest. We cannot harbour pride and at the same time be like the meek and lowly Jesus. Must we not pray that by any means we may be made humble? May we not still say, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me?"

Home from Work.

To those who live in towns and cities, different hours of the day present certain sights and sounds peculiar to themselves. Among the experiences of the hour between the lights none is more striking or suggestive than the sounds of home-going feet, and the sights of men, women, and children returning from their daily toil. "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." It is a very long day's work which has to be accomplished by the busy workers in our land between the morning and the night. But when it is over, and tired hands, aching heads, and wistful hearts are set at liberty, the time of rest so longed for, so greatly needed, must be very sweet and precious.

One cannot watch the crowds of people leaving work without feeling glad that they have homes to go to. They look very weary; their feet do not hurry as they do in the mornings; the work they have been engaged in has left its marks upon them. They look, many of them, rather depressed and uncomfortable, but they are going home. A few words are spoken to their comrades as they walk together along the street, and a cheery good-night is uttered as they branch off into different directions, and then the doors open, and they pass in and are hidden away from the inhospitalities of the streets. Familiar faces greet them; the home circles widen to take them in; glad eyes look up to welcome them, and a little warmth and pleasure steal into their hearts, for the work is over and they have come home. They can take their meal—the most comfortable one of all the day—without having to hurry over it; they have leïsure to say a few merry words and make a few kindly inquiries, and altogether, by the time that the hour between the lights has passed, there has been effected upon them quite a wonderful transformation, for they look and feel almost like other persons. No doubt there may be still some things to grieve them—the home in which their hours of leisure are passed is not a paradise, but it is home, and that is much.

As we think of the home-welcomes that are so sweet to us all, we can scarcely help thinking also of One who knew very little about them. Of all the sorrows that touch us in this world none is harder to bear than the sorrow of loneliness. And yet John concludes the description of a day of toil and trouble with these words, "And every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives." The people who were with Him, some loving, some rejecting, left Him when the shadows were thick upon the hills; in their families they could talk together of the strange things He had said, and the still more remarkable things He had done; but no friendly door opened to let Him in, no tender touches soothed away His sorrow, no sheltering roof covered Him from the contumely of the world. "The Son of Man had not where to lay His head."

Another thought may well come to us as we see the people thronging homewards at the close of the day. Here and there, perhaps, as they cross the squares or the bridges, the tired faces are lighted for a moment or two by the glory of the setting sun.

And so it may be when we, too, have finished our day's work, and we have turned our faces homeward. We shall be tired and travel-stained, but we shall be going westward, and even before we see our Father's house its lights may fall upon us, and cheer the remaining steps of the journey. Happy will be that hour between the lights, for when the dusk has passed away, and the work is all done, we shall enter the perfect rest of the day that has no night.

My Father's House.

LITTLE I know of my Father's house,
Away in the better land,
But I know that its mansions are very fair,
And filled with the dear home band.

I know that the night is never dark,
And the day is ne'er too long,
And the happy singers grow never tired
Of singing the praiseful song.

Often I think of my Father's house,
And I long for a glimpse of light;
I yearn for an echo of songs they sing,
And a picture of their delight
Who dwell in peace by the throne of God,
Out of the reach of sin,
In the land that knows not a fading time,
Nor sorrow can enter in.

When shall I come to my Father's house,
When is the time of grace?
When may I lay my burdens down,
And look in my Father's face?
I must be patient and wait a while,
He will nor forget His child,
Son will His angel carry me
To the land of the undefiled.

Friends I love in my Father's house
Are waiting with welcomes there,
And happy spirits in perfect joy
Rest by the mansions fair.
But I weary alone for my Father, God;
Soon as His face I see
I shall awake and be satisfied,
For that will be heaven to me.

Rough Wind and its Use.

"She loves her child so well, and cares for her so tenderly, that she would not let the wind blow upon her if she could help it."

Of course, having heard such a remark as this, we shall immediately, as in duty bound, begin to read a new and original, not to say striking lecture upon the faults and

follies of over-fond mothers. We can see—in imagination—hosts of horrors which are to fall upon the devoted head of that unfortunately loved child, and we exclaim, with all the indignation we are capable of, against the spoiling system to which she is subjected by her unwise parent. Undue severity is a bad thing; but what words are strong enough to express our abhorrence of the bad effects of too much fondness!

What is the cause of the universal impatience with which the over-care of others is regarded? Are we quite sure that the only objection we have to it is that the objects of such care will suffer for it afterwards? Is it not just possible that a little bit of envy mingles with our indignation? We don't happen to be over-loved ourselves, perhaps? we go out into the world, and the wind may blow upon us from all quarters at once, and nobody will care. Is it likely that we shall put on rose-coloured glasses with which to look at the favourites who are wrapped in warm arms, and sheltered by loving hearts? Is it to be wondered at if we prefer to glance at the after-time which must come, when they will be thrust out also to shiver and faint? It must be so delicious to be guarded, and cared for, and watched over; it must be so exceedingly delightful to be a spoilt child while the spoiling lasts, that spectators may well feel half-jealous of its happiness.

But we are not going to admit that there is anything so sinister in our indignation. We know what a bad thing it really is for the child, what mistaken kindness the mother is showing. We know that for the wind to blow upon it is a good thing; it will invigorate, and brace, and strengthen it; it will quicken the blood, and freshen the cheeks, and brighten the eyes. It will clear the brain, and make the limbs active, and the heart buoyant. Who that knows anything about it would not rather have the wind blowing upon them for a part of the time at least?

And so in very love for our children, and because we wish them to enjoy life, to have plenty of it, and to be strong and vigorous, with keen appetites and eager joy, we choose the wiser course. We let the wind blow upon them, we teach them to love the fresh breezes and the invigorating north-easter, we encourage them to bear even

what seems sharp and unpleasant because we love them too well to spoil them.

But, strange, contradictory creatures as we are, we do not feel always content when our heavenly Father deals with us in the same way. "Let us always have summer, let the flowers always grow, let us always sing pleasant songs, let our days be fair and bright, let us be sheltered from the storm and the cold. We do not like the sharp, searching winds; we do not enjoy the brisk breeze, we would rather live in the light and the sunshine."

Ah, but our Father is wise, and does not listen to us. He sends us winter. He does not intend that we should be weak, puling babies all our lives; we are to grow and to be strong, and to be able to enjoy all His good gifts as well as to work for Him. It is true that He has provided a shelter from the storm, but He will not have us always there. We must go out and brave the weather and fight against the winds. We must climb mountains in the very face of the blast, we must bear trouble, and disappointment, and sorrow, and not only bear them, but make stepping-stones of them. And every windy day we must count as so much gain.

Does not our Father love us, then, when He makes so much that is unpleasant accompany us? We know He does.

It is because He loves us that He lets the winds beat upon us. He loves us best when the storms come. We need not fear. We never need tremble lest the wind should be too strong for us. "He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." Do we mind what happens when our Father is over us all?

"Redeeming the Time."

We do not always remember the injunction of the wise man—"Thy father's friend forsake not," for many maxims and rules which stood our fathers in good stead are either

forgotten or ignored by us their children. We are rather fond of marking out ways for ourselves, which are far enough from the footsteps which they have left behind them; for they did not always choose the smooth and pleasant paths, and we take the roughness or the pleasantness very much into consideration. There was a ruggedness about our fathers which, though we may have no inclination to imitate, we cannot but admire. They were noble and strong, we say in ungrudging generosity of speech; but it is, after all, rather delicious to be ease-loving, and luxurious, and self-gratifying. We prefer our own way, and we have a consciousness that, after all, in our altered circumstances there is something to be said in its favour.

For instance, they have left us a very neat motto, which we cannot help remembering, about retiring and rising early, and the immense advantages, consisting of health, wealth, and wisdom, which will arise from that very uncomfortable but wholesome habit. But we, having a taste for gas, and music, and social converse, and the fireside, and a distaste for semi-darkness, and unwarmed rooms, and foggy mornings, are apt to take an hour or two from the night and repay it with property belonging to the day, and are actually vain enough to believe that we are gainers thereby. They have left us directions as to the improvement of time, and warnings against wasting it; but, alas! we have grown prodigal, and instead of taking care of the pence that the pounds may accumulate, we squander minutes and half-hours, and such small change, without so much as a blush at our extravagance. We live in different times, we say. We smile half-pityingly at the wonderful biographies of wise men who became exceedingly rich because they always picked up pins, and old nails, and pieces of string, and replied to their correspondents on the backs of their own letters. We are sorry for them, because paper was so dear and time of so little value. We can earn pounds as quickly as they saved pence, and we look back rather slightingly upon the good old times. We lay ourselves out in a widely different way, and, instead of being so over-careful of minutes, we wilfully and deliberately give up whole hours to what we are pleased to call necessary recreation.

This is all very well and reasonable, but it behoves us, as thoughtful and Christian people, to inquire whether we do not go rather too far in treating time so cavalierly. It is expected of us that we should be *redeeming the time;* and it may fairly be asked whether, even making allowances for the circumstances in which we live, we are not too often absolutely wasteful of it. We can afford to leave a broad margin for social intercourse, and recreation, and abundant rest; but even then are there not many hours in the week in which we do not amuse ourselves or each other, do not seek healthful exercise, do not improve or even interest the mind, do not read or talk, or even think to any purpose whatever? If there are, we plainly deserve that our forefathers should condemn us, as by both their words and example they certainly do; and we deserve also, what is worse still, the accusations of our own consciences.

It seems impossible to be as methodical and as firm people used to be. It would be little use for us to apportion our time—four hours for private study, eight for manual labour, and so on — because our private study would be interrupted and our manual labour frequently stopped. Even our desire to redeem the time is not a sufficient excuse for being ungracious and disobliging. But because of this we ought not to be discouraged; and we ought to be eager and conscientious in the performance of our duty still. It is wonderful what some people do, even while conforming to this altered state of society; but it only shows that "where there's a will there's a way."

Let us live as those who must give an account. Even though the way should be pleasant, and life a delightful season, let us not forget that we have a charge to keep, a mission to fulfil, a God to serve; and that, whether we like to think so or not, life is, after all, a terribly earnest thing.

Hasty Words.

"I SAID in my haste, All men are liars." "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." And these last hasty words were even worse than those of David, for it would be infinitely better for all men to be liars than for God to forget. But both expressions are only specimens of thousands of hasty words which are uttered every day upon our earth, and they are only average words, presenting a picture by no means overdrawn. They are very unjust; but intemperate speakers do not pause to question either the justice or the mercy of what they say. In passionate haste, in undiscerning wrath, they pour out their cutting words, never pausing to notice where they fall, and quite undeterred by their wounding effects.

The evil that is in our world, and which rushes down our streets, devastating homes, ruining happiness, and laying waste the pleasant places, has many fountains. Sin does its deadly work in many ways, and sorrow comes from a variety of sources. And hasty words have certainly much to answer for among the rest. We are apt to think that a word or two does not matter, that we need not trouble ourselves to be over-particular as to what we say. But that is only one of our many mistakes. Words live. There is so much vitality in them that they take root even upon very unlikely soil. And if we sow the wind, we need not be surprised if we reap the whirlwind.

Hasty words are almost sure to have little sense and less kindness in them. They are not the offspring of meek and quiet spirits, but of hot passionate tempers. "All men are liars!" Who but a man in a passion would have said that? The assertion is so sweeping and so unjust, that if David had not prefaced it by his confession, "I said in my haste," we should have understood it. Perhaps the reason why such words are spoken, is, that the speaker feels himself aggrieved. We often do in this life of ours; we cannot have all we wish from our brothers and sisters, and so we allow ourselves to grow fretful and angry. We are unreasonable enough to suppose that all things should

be ours, and when we find only a few things coming to our share, then we become discontented and peevish, and speak hasty words. Then we say very hard words of each other, and most sinfully say, in our hearts if not with our tongues, hard things of our wise and loving Father.

Seeing that hasty words are so unkind, unjust, and untrue, how can we prevent ourselves from uttering them, and so escape the need of the after-repentance, which is their consequence?

"*He that believeth shall not make haste.*" Is not the secret of our impatience to be found in our lack of faith in God? If our hearts were stayed upon Him, if we were like children resting in our Father's arms, would every little thing that occurred around us have such power over us? If we knew, so as to realise the fact, that nothing happens to us without His permission, that what seems so provoking in those who are about us would not be allowed to trouble us unless He willed it so; if we saw that words, trials, inconveniences, and even unkindnesses, only come to us according to His pleasure, surely then we should cease to be hasty! It is because we forget this, because we do not listen to the tender words spoken ever to us. "Can a woman forget her suckling child? . . . yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee." If we knew Him, if we understood anything of the might and faithfulness of His love, we should never dare to say, "The Lord hath forsaken me."

Faith in our Father, calm trust in His love, resignation to what cannot but be for our real good, seeing that He sends it, these are the cures for hasty words.

In the Dark.

We do not like darkness. We have as little of it as possible. If the sun will not shine, then let us make the most of moon and stars, or if these fail let us have oil or gas. It seems natural in our present state to shorten the

night as much as possible. We do not get tired of the daylight; we are jealous of it, and would keep it long that the darkness might have no power over us.

And yet it is no good hoping that we shall have nothing but light. Even if we do not want to remember it, the days are growing shorter and shorter, and we have to go down into the winter.

And this is only a specimen of what our lives must often be. However we may dislike the short days and the darkness we must have both. We should like to see our way, but we cannot. Only a step is visible; all the rest is shrouded in gloom. If the objects which gradually loom before us are terrible, we cannot be frightened at them overmuch until we know what they are. If they are prizes we cannot be unduly elated, for even the gold does not glitter Sometimes indeed we may

> "Stand upon the mount of God,
> With sunlight in the soul."

But often we are deep down in the valleys or in the midst of the thick woods, where no light can penetrate, and where we have no idea as to which path to take, nor what is waiting for us in the way.

But ought we not to believe that, just because so much darkness is given to us by our Father, darkness must therefore be exceedingly good for us? Does any father give to his children an abundance of anything that is injurious to them? If they think at all, must they not feel sure that the parental love is strong enough to be trusted? And shall we doubt our Father though we should have wintry days and starless nights?

We get into the habit of supposing that darkness is indicative of our Father's displeasure. We fancy that He is frowning when we cannot see the brightness of His face. Does the careful gardener who covers up his plants so that they may not be injured by the cold put them into the dark because he is angry with them? Does it not rather show that they are precious to him, and therefore he wants to preserve them, and make them healthy and strong? And is not our Father wiser than any?

We are so apt to be frightened at the dark, silly children that we are. There is safety in the night, only we do not know it. Night is peaceful, calm, holy, restful. Why

should we fill it with all sorts of imaginary evils? Besides, it is in the night that our Father draws the nearest to us. He is never weary or oppressed with sleep. He watches His children when the shadows fall upon them. And, after all, can it be so very dark where He is? Is He not light itself? One would not so very much mind walking blindfold along a path when one's hand was closely held in that of a dearest friend who could see well and perfectly understood the way. And when we find how safely our Father leads us, selecting the best places, leading us over soft turf, carrying us where the rocks are sharp, warding off all dangers, should we not feel glad of the darkness that makes us in our helplessness so dear to Him, and Him in His strength so dear to us? We may be glad to be saved the trouble of choosing our own way, and content to sing constantly—

"Lead *Thou* me on."

A Change.

"WHAT you want is an entire change of place, change of scene, change of air, change of diet—a change, in fact, in every way." This is a prescription often given by medical men, and many things are more pleasant to take. Very young folks are fond of a change, and some old persons rather enjoy it, but the idea is not always delightful to steady, home-loving people. A change means a different house, the absence of our favourite easy-chair, an alteration in the time of receiving our letters, perhaps an uncomfortable bed, and many etceteras not nice to contemplate. And yet there is no doubt at all but that the draught, however bitter in anticipation, may be exceedingly sweet in the taking, and produce most salutary results. No doubt a change is to some people really a necessity at certain periods. The same dull routine, the same bare patch of waste ground, the same pattern of paper upon the same four walls, all monotonous things of

this kind seem to act upon some temperaments like incipient poison, which deranges the system and makes it altogether out of health. And then it is not drugs, or globules, or anything of the kind that can restore life and energy, but only a change.

But when you have made up your mind to it, and gone through all the dreary work of packing and arranging for the trains, have you ever noticed how dear the old life suddenly becomes? It is not easy to say "Good-bye" even for a month, so much may happen in the meantime. And when you have reached your journey's end how desolate are the first few days in the strange place! You cannot help pining for home, and for a sight of the old familiar faces. You pass crowds of people, and many of them have bright eyes and wonderful complexions, and grand and mysterious hair; but none of them are half so beautiful to you as those far plainer ones which you love so well that you cannot think of them without tears. Now and then your heart gives a great leap; you think you have seen some one whom you know, who passed your own window only yesterday. But no; none but strangers are about you now. And then the evenings! It is not so bad when you are climbing up rocks, or walking along the edge of the shore; but when you go back to your lodgings, tired with the day's exertion, with nothing to do in the twilight, and no one to speak to, then is the time for the home-sickness to set in.

But all these feelings are but signs that the medicine is having its proper effect.

The keenness of the loneliness will pass off shortly, and you will be able to enter with greater zest into the pleasures which your holiday-place affords. And when it is over, and the flush of health is back into your cheek, and your step is elastic, and your spirits are high, then you will see what the change has done for you! The street which looked so dingy before you left will be bright and homelike, the fields and the hedges will look pleasant, the work of which you had grown weary will be taken up with the interest of love, and the friends of whom you were not tired, but towards whom you were sometimes petulant and impatient, will receive the penitent affection of true and tender hearts. And so the change will have

wrought its good in many ways, and though it may have been more expensive than bottles of physic, it will have been sweeter and more efficacious.

Sometimes for our spiritual health the great Physician prescribes the same remedy. Without knowing it perhaps we have been falling sick. We have not cared for the food which God's Word or His house supplies. We have grown weary in our work. We have cared very little for things which should have been our greatest joy. Still we saw no cause for alarm. But suddenly we have found ourselves in changed circumstances. We have been removed from our quiet occupations. Familiar objects have been removed. Trouble comes, and we suffer from loss and loneliness. We cannot understand why it should be, but when it is over we see by the vigour which returns to our spiritual life that we needed a change.

We wonder sometimes how we shall feel when the great change comes to us. Shall we at first feel desolate and home-sick *there?* Oh, no! for it will not be strange. Is it not being gradually filled by our beloved ones, and will not He whom we have so longed to see come to us there? It will indeed be home, for we shall be with Jesus. Let us, then, if we have any indication that that is the change awaiting us soon, get ready to start with hopeful anticipations for the great joy awaiting us. For this is what can be said of us when that has taken place, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

Mothers' Meetings.

ONCE upon a time a meeting of a very interesting character was held in one of our towns. The mayor, a Christian man, whose wife feels an interest in mothers meetings, invited all the members of those societies to tea. In response to this invitation about nineteen hundred mothers and their husbands met together (many of them, of course, bringing their babies with them), and

seemed greatly to enjoy the good things set before them, as well as the convenient opportunity thus afforded for a little friendly gossip with one another. After the tea these mothers, belonging to all denominations, were addressed by the different ministers of the town, who, whatever they were, clergymen of the Church of England, Congregationalists, Baptists, Wesleyans, or anything else, seemed glad of the occasion, and well pleased to say a few kindly and earnest words to so important a meeting.

It was a very pleasant holiday for a mass of hard-working people, and many a mayor might do a worse thing than have such a tea-party, but after all it was not that gathering, but what it represented, that was the important part of the business. It was not so much this large mothers' meeting as the small ones, which, being held every week, must, if they are at all well attended, do great good, to which the thoughts of all thinking persons turned. It seems, on such an evening, in spite of babies who persist in singing at wrong times, to be rather a pleasant thing to be a mother. But there is, as every woman knows, another side to the picture, and that other side reveals the fact that to be a mother is an awfully solemn thing too. It means a great deal more than merely nursing the pretty little things and taking them out to tea-parties. Poor women, who have little time for reflection, feel this great responsibility at times most profoundly. They know that they hold in their arms little creatures who, if God spares the fragile precious lives, will be a power in the world, and as they look in their faces many a mother wishes she were better fitted for her trust, and more able to teach them how to think, and feel, and act.

There is no doubt that this spirit of earnestness is fostered by mothers' meetings, and that helpful words are spoken to very eager ears upon the subject. It is a strange thing, but true, that many women who make no pretensions to Christianity themselves are yet in their secret hearts very wishful that their children should be spiritually richer. "I hope my girl will be a better woman than her mother" is the unspoken thought of many a loving heart regretting its own unworthiness. And these women do what they can to place their children under religious influences. They send them to Sunday-school, and ask "good

people" to talk to them, although they whose words would sink the most deeply into the hearts of the little ones never venture to say anything themselves upon solemn subjects. But one thing which should be done, and probably is done at these meetings, is to make them understand that to bring their children to Jesus is the mothers' duty, as it would be their highest joy.

Another want which is felt by mothers and met by these meetings is instruction in the management of children. Many are very young, not much more than children themselves, when the highest duties are laid upon them. And they feel their own inefficiency deeply. Of course they would learn wisdom by first making mistakes, as many do; but it is a grave thing to make mistakes with regard to children, for as soon as you have found out your error they are children no longer, and the time is too late. At the mothers' meetings hints may be given and valuable knowledge gained which will prevent many an error. It is a good thing for the mothers to talk together about their children. Of course, the first things to settle are what to do in case of teething, measles, whooping-cough, and similar difficulties, but then come other subjects, such as what it is best to do with children smitten with the diseases of passion, sullenness, obstinacy, and disobedience. And a vast amount of good is accomplished when mothers go home to their charge strong in the knowledge of the best way to meet such emergencies.

In a few years' time, if the New Education Act does all that is required of it, girls will, perhaps, be taught common sense and needlework. But at present meetings of some kind are very necessary in order that poor women who have probably spent all the years of their girlhood in factories may learn how to make and cut out their children's clothes. And so while the school boards are meeting, and discussing and making up their minds, we wish all speed to mothers' meetings, where in the mean time earnest women are pushing on the good work.

Children's Meetings.

THIS is an age of meetings. People gather together in large numbers for various purposes; but there are no such meetings as those connected with children. What monster meetings they are! How large a place is needed for them, if the town in which they are held is of any size! For children are as plentiful as flowers in spring; they grow everywhere and in great profusion, and there are so many of them that they can be got together in groups with very little trouble.

In many villages and towns a plan is adopted, which, for various reasons, is so good that it might be followed still farther. It is the gathering together of the children belonging to all the Sunday-schools in the district for the purpose of holding a united service. It consists largely—as of course it should do where children are concerned—of a musical entertainment; but, if the assembly is not so large as to render it impossible, addresses are delivered suitable to their comprehension and circumstances. And at least two good results follow. An opportunity has been afforded for Christian labourers and the young people of the different denominations to fraternise; and the town has had the benefit of seeing a sight than which none is more beautiful—that of a large number of bright young faces.

Next to mothers' meetings, children's meetings are most important. There are some who complain that the youth of our land monopolise too large a share of public attention. "What a fuss," say the grumblers, "do you make about these children! What are they, that they should so often be put first? Everybody is talking about the children; there is a deal too much made of them." Nay, that can scarcely be. Reforms which are for adults are often very partially successful. It is too late to try to bend the tree in any particular direction when it is full-grown, but while it is yet a sapling almost anything can be made of it. Besides, what have we to look to for the future but the children? If they fail, what a great failure will the coming years altogether be! If the children are not better than their fathers, what will become of our poor world?

They are wise who think much of the young. The heads of households are greatly wanting in wisdom if they do not consider the tastes and needs of those who are under them. If the children are slighted, neglected, alienated, there is little hope for that home. If they are loved, trusted, cultivated, happy will be the years that are to come. If churches are wise they are very careful over the children; for they recognise in them the future men and women who shall be their members, and who will carry on the work of the Lord. They will not entrust their youth to unskilful hands, but will place over them those whose influence will be great and always for the right. They will not crowd the children away into back seats and uncomfortable places, and so give them a dislike to the house of God; but they will take pains to secure their love and good-will, that they may be turned to the best account in the future. And if the nation be wise, it, too, will look after its young with most earnest and persevering care.

So, although it is true that much is thought of and much done for the children, we should rejoice that it is so. Acts of Parliament, school boards, educational societies, and Sunday-school unions, all have work to do, and there are not too many agencies. We can only hope that the blessing and the guidance of the children's Saviour may be given to all those who have anything to do with children's meetings.

Of what Use are Children?

PLAYFUL, idle little ones,
Full of nought but pleasure,
With your mirthful glees and songs,
Brimming with joy's measure,
Where's the good of all of you,
But to try and tease us?
When were you of any use,
But to slily please us?

Playful, idle little ones,
God has sent you near us,
With your winning words and ways,
That they all may cheer us.
Not in vain your gayest laugh
Or your mimic sadness;
For our hours, when you were near,
Have been full of gladness.

Playful, idle little ones,
Though the earth is crowded,
There is room for you to play
Ere the days are shrouded.
If you make a weary man
Half forget his sorrow,
Useful you have been to-day,
And shall be to-morrow.

Playful, idle little ones,
Like the spring's fresh flowers,
Your delightful joy and fun
Seem to come in showers.
And the days shall come and go,
Pleasant and distressing;
But your little gifts from heaven
Shall be only blessing.

Playful, idle little ones,
Loved by God the Father,
Safely, close, and tenderly,
May He ever gather
You beneath His sheltering wing,
Till to you are given
Bliss, and rest, and lasting youth,
In the home of heaven.

Kindness to Animals.

A TALK WITH THE CHILDREN.

WE are told that—

> "Evil is wrought by want of thought,
> As well as want of heart."

This "want of thought" may perhaps lie at the foundation of much of the cruelty that the animal world has to endure at the hands of those who for two special reasons among many ought to exercise kindness and consideration towards all dumb things. One reason is that God has entrusted them to us, and so in a sense appeals to our most generous feelings; and the other is that they are helpless and dependent upon us for much of the comfort and happiness they have in the world. If a lad has given into his charge a little baby brother or sister, if he have any feelings of honour or tenderness of heart, the very fact of his being so trusted will call them forth, and he will be brave to protect and assiduous to please the little helpless one. And this feeling of chivalry is exceedingly good for the lad as well as for the babe. One hour of this happy service rendered by the strong to the feeble is worth more than whole days of mere selfish or personal gratification.

If animals could appeal in the same way to the feelings of humanity and protecting kindness in our boys and girls, what a good thing it would be! We should have more manly men and more womanly women than we have at present. Our boys would be educated in their duty to think of and for all creatures that cannot think for themselves, and they would grow up to what they certainly ought to be, not their tyrants, but their protectors. And if it be true that cruelty proceeds from thoughtlessness, then children must be led to think more of what they owe to the animal creation.

But surely a kind-hearted boy or girl cannot be really unkind to animals, and it must be that in at least most cases this—

> "Evil is wrought from want of *heart*."

Too many of our children seem to be inherently cruel,

and they need to be made to see and feel how sinful and abhorrent cruelty is.

Do you know, children (we would say to them), that you ought to do to animals as you would have them do to you, if they had the power? That is called the golden rule, and it is so good that it might be applied to them as well as to ourselves. Well, would you like your hairs pulled out as you pull out the hairs of the horse's mane and tail, or as you pluck off the wool from the sheep's back? Would you like to be picked up as you so often pick up the cat? If you were in the water, would you like to be fetched out (as you fetch out the fish) by having a hook fastened into your chin? Yet you are continually hurting animals in these and similar ways. Have you never seen a poor donkey beaten unmercifully by a boy along the road because it had so heavy a load that it could not move quickly? Whenever you see that sight you may be sure that if that boy does not alter very much, some day he will be beating his mother or sister or wife. For he who is unkind to animals would be unkind to anything. The boy is a coward who beats things that cannot help themselves. If he were not a coward and wanted to fight he would fight some one who would pay him back. But he does not want to be hurt, only his cruel heart delights in hurting the defenceless.

It is such boys as these who, when grown up to be men, join with a number of other men and women on horseback and forty or fifty dogs. And what do you think such an array is for? To hunt lions, or tigers, or great dragons like that which was said to be slain by St. George? Oh, no! All these brave men and dogs and horses are about to hunt one poor little creature to death that is not quite so large as one of their dogs! And this they call *sport!* And this is the name that they give to modern pigeon-shooting. You would not like your mothers to love such sport as that, and yet there *are* ladies who look on and clap their hands when the beautiful pigeons are shot as they are trying to regain their liberty.

Oh, boys and girls, we hope you will find better sport than this. Be very sure that cruelty debases and hardens the hearts both of those who indulge in it, and of those who look on while others do so. If things must be

killed it should be done in the most easy and rapid way possible. And all beasts, and birds, and insects that are not needed, and that do no injury, should be allowed to live, and to enjoy their life. Do you not know that God has made them, that they are His creatures, and that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without His knowledge? Then for His sake, and your own, as well as theirs, be kind to the animals for whom He provides food, and over whom He watches. "A merciful man is merciful to his beast."

"After Many Days."

AWAY in the country, there are sights and sounds to gladden all human hearts, let them be never so weary, when the activities of the summer have fairly begun. If we walk down the cool glades of the forest, inhaling the pleasant scents of pines, and ferns, and wild flowers, we shall almost certainly come upon huge trunks of trees which have been felled, and which now, stripped of their bark, are beginning to repay their owners for ground which they have occupied for many generations. In the orchards and gardens busy fingers are already engaged in rifling the trees and bushes of their fruit, and in procuring the fresh young vegetables that will tempt many a failing appetite. And in the meadows, beautiful with tall nodding grass, and gold-gleaming buttercups, the mowers have commenced their work, and the sharp scythes are laying low the beauty of the field.

It is well indeed for us all to look upon such sights. We have so much waiting to do, that if patience is not a common virtue among us it ought to be, seeing how frequently we have need to exercise it. So long indeed do some things tarry that we become quite hopeless about ever realising them, and take up our tasks and carry our burdens with a sullen kind of resignation that expects nothing but the power to endure still, and looks for no recompense.

But this is neither a happy nor a profitable frame of mind, and therefore it is well for us to walk about among the glories of the summer and let its blessed teachings fall upon our ears and into our hearts. It is good for us to see that faith and patience answer well, and that Time certainly brings more than he takes away. Were not the fruit-trees barren all the winter—destitute of even a single leaf of encouragement? Was there not a time when the meadows were blanched and white, and even the grass refused to spring up? And does not the oak-tree take, as it seems to impatient people, an unconscionable time to grow? There is one song which Nature never tires of singing, but which we are very loth to listen to—"Wait and work and trust. Work and trust and wait." And it shows us beyond all doubt that though the blessing seem long in coming it comes. God does not disappoint; He will never fail those who with steadfast but wistful eyes look up to Him. "After many days" the corn springs up. "After many days" the leaves grow. "After many days" the bountiful fruit clusters on the trees. "After many days" we too "shall reap if we faint not."

Let all who are growing weary take heart again. It is hard to do any kind of work diligently and perseveringly month after month without having anything to show for it, and without apparently being any nearer to the reward than we were at first. It does need faith to keep on with cheerful heart and unflagging spirits. But we need no more faith than the farmer. Does not he sow, and wait a long time before he reaps? Does not he need plenty of patience and quite a double portion of hope?

"But he finds every year that his waiting has not been in vain!"

And so do you. No year passes without some unexpected payments, some desires fulfilled, some wishes granted. Oh, let us not keep our eyes closed to the mercies that have come because some that we wished for are delayed. It may not be our summer yet, notwithstanding the blue skies, and the songs of birds; but it will be before very long. We shall live in the cloudless land, and, looking into our Father's face, shall see and read distinctly all that bewilders us now. "After many days" we shall get our joy. Let us be content to wait.

Bread upon the Waters.

A LONE woman sat in her cottage as the daylight died away. It was too dark to see longer the blessed words of the old-fashioned Bible which lay upon her lap, and in the quiet village where she lived gas was unattainable luxury. So she mused upon the comfortable words she had read, and lifted her heart in thankfulness to the Master whom she loved and served. Presently her thought went to the one strong tie which still held her to the earth. She was a widow, but she had one son. He was away in the great town some miles off, not being content with the humdrum life he would have had to live at home. He was getting on too, she knew, earning good wages, for he had sent his mother a little present of money, which she had carefully and thankfully stowed away for future emergencies. But it was not of that she was thinking. She wondered where her boy was spending the evening, and thought with a shudder of the blazing gin-palaces, and music-halls, and cheap theatres which she had seen when visiting the town. The thought caused the mother to fall on her knees, and earnestly plead with God on her boy's behalf, as she had often done before. She did not ask success, long life, or any smaller blessing for him, but the burden of her prayer was, "O Lord, convert him, change his heart; save him for Jesus' sake."

At the same time in the same village an old man preparing to retire for the night thought of those who years before had been his Sunday-school boys. And as he thought, his heart warmed toward the lads, and he wondered how many of them he would see in the home above to which he knew himself to be rapidly hastening. Especially he thought of one, "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow," and the old man that night prayed more earnestly than ever that God would have mercy upon the lad, and lead him to the Lord Jusus. And his prayers and those of the mother went up to heaven together.

At the same hour in the large town which held the lad for whom this solicitude was felt, crowds of people were

gathering toward one place. And he, with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth, came up, wondering why so many people were meeting in the Town-hall.

He waited for a minute, looking for a companion who was to have met him and taken him to spend the evening at a public-house.

He could not see him, and so inquired of a man what was going on at the Town-hall.

"Preaching," said the man. "A gentleman from London is coming to talk to the people. Come in and hear him."

"It is a queer place for a sermon," said he. "Why don't they have one of the churches or chapels?"

"Oh, because some people will come here who would not go to a regular place of worship. Come in, there is room now, though the seats will soon be full. There is nothing to pay."

"No, thank you," and the lad tried to sneer, but somehow he could not, for he felt half inclined to go "just to see what it was like." It was a long time since he had heard a sermon, and he was not sure that he wished to hear one now, and yet he waited outside the place.

"It would please mother, I reckon, if she knew it, and if I go she shall know, for I will write and tell her. But no, I shall not go; what should I go there for?"

But that moment the opening hymn was commenced, and the sound of the singing came out into the street, and the young man hesitated no longer but entered the building. The person who had invited him found him a seat, and lent him a hymn-book, and the lad joined in the singing, for he knew both the hymn and tune well. He did not pay much attention to the reading of the Scripture or the prayer, but thought of other things, wondering whether his friend were outside waiting, and feeling half inclined to go. But his attention was arrested by the very first words the preacher uttered; and as the sermon went on he grew more and more earnest; for the word came home to his soul, applied by the power of the Holy Spirit. He almost forgot the presence of the large assembly, and felt that he must cry out, "What must I do to be saved?"

After the service the preacher invited any who wished,

to stop and speak to him. The young man stayed and told all that was in his heart. Plainly the way of salvation was pointed out to him, and before he left he had found the Saviour.

That night he wrote two letters—one to his mother, and one to his old teacher, calling upon them to bless the Lord for His mercy, not knowing that at the very time they were praying for him.

"Ye Would Not."

"I WOULD, but ye would not." The words might have been spoken in his ears, so plainly did they come to him as he walked along the crowded streets, while the thickening darkness gathered around. The man had been spending his day as usual in business; he had planned and bargained, had sold and got gain, and he was weary as he went towards his home.

"Is it worth all the time and strength I give to it? Supposing I am successful, and become a really prosperous tradesman, what will be the good of it? If I am no happier then than now, I shall care very little about it."

The meeting of several acquaintances broke the thread of his thought, but it came back to him again a few minutes after.

"What a weary, restless world it is after all. Is it always to be so to me, I wonder? Shall I never find anything to satisfy me, anything that will really repay me for the time and strength I am giving?"

"*I would, but ye would not.*"

Where had he heard those words? What did they mean? Why did they come into his mind now?

These questions he was not able to answer; but he went home with the words still lingering in his memory.

Even when the pleasant glow of his fire sent a comfortable warmth through him he did not forget them.

"Did I read them in the Bible, I wonder? They almost sound like Bible words."

He had once sat at the feet of a pious mother, and some of the texts he learnt then abode with him still. So he repeated several. And last he thought of two, the Saviour's pathetic appeal to Jerusalem, and that other solemn assertion, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life."

The man was very lonely, very sad, and very restless. But he thought of the old days, and tried to remember what his mother used to say about such verses as these. He knew what coming to Jesus meant. He remembered how when he was quite young he was almost persuaded to be a Christian, until worldly influences were so strong as to prevent his yielding. He would have had to give up so much, he thought, and he wanted to give up nothing.

He was almost sorry now.

"Perhaps it is too late," he said. "Then He would, but I would not; but now perhaps He is weary of waiting, and will not receive me."

But the old lessons came into his mind. He had forgotten many things, but one he had not forgotten—it was the persistence with which his mother insisted upon the boundless, unutterable, unwearied love of the Saviour.

"I will try Him," said the man; "I ought to be ashamed to come to Him now only because I want Him so much, but perhaps He will not be angry, or if He is He will relent."

He did come to Christ. He was late in coming, but He came, and Jesus received him, and comforted him, and gave him something better to live for than he had had before.

And so bread sown upon the waters was found after many days.

Bleak Places.

It is far more comfortable to sit by the fire, curtained away from the wind, and cheered and warmed by the music and light of home, than it is to wander about on moors and hills. Such places are for the summer-time, when the sun is generous, and the birds are merry, and the flowers are numberless; and when the stroller is repaid for his walk by such a landscape picture as only summer could produce. But it is so different in the winter. He who walks abroad finds many bleak places. He has to do battle with the cold east wind, and the fight is rather unequal, for the enemy has subtle weapons, which creep, and pierce, and wound on all sides.

Even when wind, and rain, and mud have been conquered, and bleak places have been gained, the reward is not particularly great or valuable. The blast bites so cruelly that he would be glad of any shelter. But the hedges seem to be all thorns, the leaves having been swept off some time ago.

As for the view he gets, nothing could well be more desolate. The fields are brown and bare, the trees are all naked, and there are strange weird sounds among the branches; heavy mists hang over the valleys, the skies are covered by thick, grey clouds, that let not a ray of sunshine through, and the dreary earth frowns back in sullen discontent. Even if there were no wind a bleak place would be a very uncomfortable one.

And yet it is good occasionally to stand upon bleak places. Fighting with an east wind is capital exercise; one is apt to come away from the conflict feeling better and more vigorous, with a new light in the eyes, and a healthy glow upon the cheeks. And another result of standing upon bleak places is that our blessings are likely to be better appreciated afterward. As the keen wind cuts us through and through, as feet and face and hands become cold, and the spirit is ready to sink at sight of the utter desolation all around us,—there is warmth in the very thought of the snug room at home where the bright fire is burning. Ordinarily, perhaps, we think less of our

comforts than we should, but they are very dear to us as we stand in the bleak places. We look at the little blinking lights in distant homes, and think quite poetically of the happy faces and cheerful hearts gathered there. Very likely the inmates do not consider themselves so fortunate, —they may at the moment be grumbling about hard work and poor fare,—but if they could come out and stand where we do, how different would their common mercies look. Yes, it is decidedly good to stand now and then in a bleak, bare, exposed place.

Besides, it is possible to be very glad at heart even there! It may be that all the wilderness and forlornness of the place cannot shut out the sunlight that is in our hearts. Wonderful visitors sometimes stand beside us in unexpected places. Patmos was probably a very bleak and cheerless spot, but what a happy time John must have had there! He could not have cared very much for the barren rocks, nor the strong wind, nor the sullen sea, when he "turned to see the voice that spake with him," and saw Jesus.

And we need not mind bleak places of any description if there we can turn to our "Rock of Ages" for shelter. The winds will blow in vain, and in vain will the skies be clouded if there our God will be near us, and teach us His will. We shall then go briskly down among the homesteads, and declare how wonderful is His love who is the Shelter of His people, and

> "Rejoice that human hearts, through storm,
> Through shame, through death made strong,
> Before the rocks and heavens have borne
> Witness of God so long."

Hints of Spring.

As when a friend whom we expect to visit us sends a letter containing the welcome news of his approach, and so gives us the pleasure of anticipation before that of possession, so the spring sends us little harbingers which tell us the pleasant tidings that already our guest is on the way. We have been longing for it to come. Bleak winds and grey skies, bare hedges and barren fields, are not so delightful that we should wish them to remain. It is true that the snow is very beautiful, and that the winter has an amelioration in Christmas festivities; but still we love the spring, and in the dull days we cannot help wishing for its reappearance. Brightness, and sunshine, and song, are such pleasant things, and we take to them so naturally, that we cannot but be glad at the signs of their coming.

And we have them when the days are longer, and the dark nights shorter, than they were. We have not to wait so wearily for the blessed dawn, and already at the close of the day we have a short, sweet twilight, which is but a promise of calm, still hours to come. Then the colour which seemed to have faded from the skies is coming back again; they are of a deeper blue, and the clouds have a dazzling whiteness, and already there are glorious sunsets of crimson and gold. And the earth is no longer silent and sad. The lark's song cannot be sweeter when the splendid June days have come than it is now, when the warm sunshine brings us a short taste of summer. Then we have hints of the spring in the vegetation around us. It is true that there is still plenty of barrenness, but it is beginning to pass away.

There is a tinge of redness upon some of the trees, and upon others there are the swellings of buds; even the hedges are putting forth signs of life, and upon the sunny banks the first violet buds are seen. The primrose, too, and the celandine may be found, and the meadows are dotted here and there with white daisies. Even the insect world is beginning to be aroused; there are a few butterflies enjoying the warm sun, and here and there even a solitary ladybird may be seen, and it is no wonder, for the

warmth at mid-day might cheat anything into the belief that May had already arrived. Our gardens are putting on new beauty. The delicate and beloved snowdrop is the first to come, like a faithful friend who never fails us, and the crocus speedily follows. Nor has the skylark a monopoly of music, for other birds take up the glad chorus, and it will speedily become universal.

And how natural it is to rejoice in the spring-time! It is as if the world got young again, and made everything upon it renew its youth also. We cannot help feeling glad in the spring any more than we can help feeling sad in the autumn. We feel as if we must begin to sing when the birds do, and our hearts rise up to God in thankfulness and joy that the brightness is coming again. Then we have so much to hope for. It seems, indeed, as if spring-time and hope always go together. We can bear to look forward now, for surely better and brighter days are coming.

And so they are. To many, many hearts that have been sadder than winter there will come a blessing soon. Is it not always the case that sunshine follows shade, and joy succeeds to sorrow? So let all who have been spending a night of weeping look forward to a morning of joy. Into dark lives at some time or other there does come gladness, the singing of birds, and the opening of flowers.

And, besides this, the passing away of winter ought to remind us of that home where, as we are so fond of singing,—

> "Everlasting spring abides,
> And never-withering flowers."

Who can tell but what that which is happening to us now is a hint of that spring, and that we shall before long sit down and rest beneath the tree of light?

A Bunch of Snowdrops.

ALL flowers have their mission. They have all something to say to us either in the way of rebuke, or comfort, or instruction. But perhaps there is not one of them all whose coming we welcome with such delight, and whose teachings we are so eager to understand as those of the snowdrop. No doubt it is all the dearer to us because it is the first which comes after the winter; but surely even if it came in June or July, in the common flower harvest, we could not help admiring and loving it. As it is, it has so much to say. It brings a tender message from our Father which assures us that the winter is past, and that the summer is coming. It teaches two things over and above all the others—hope and purity. It does sometimes happen in our year of life that we are afraid to hope, but that cannot be when the snowdrops are here. They tell us of possibilities of beauty, and enjoyment, and rest in the future, and they beget in us all sorts of happy dreams. We begin when the snowdrops are here to look up to our God and think not of judgment but of mercy.

It is wonderful what a bunch of snowdrops can do. A man pressed down by the cares of life once was saved by them. He was perplexed by many difficulties and bowed down with much care; he did not know what to do, and had almost resolved to give up in despair. With heavy steps and gloomy countenance he went toward his office. So depressed was he that he felt as if he hated the very sight of the place. But when he entered, he found in the dingy room a bunch of delicate snowdrops. There was none to see, and the man took them in his hands and kissed them, and let his tears fall upon them, and held them while he knelt and prayed. He felt then and ever afterward that those snowdrops were blessings sent from heaven.

We have seen the effect they have in the sick-room, too, many a time. They are better than medicine, and almost as healing. They speak of life, and youth, and spring to the weary sufferer. How beautiful they are to the tired eyes, how cool to the fevered fingers, how thankful the heart feels that the flowers are coming again.

But the snowdrop is the emblem of purity, and it should teach us to be pure also. How wonderful they look, the white drooping things coming out of the brown earth; it seems as if to be so pure they ought to grow upon high trees, not so near the ground. But it is possible to be very clean even when defilement is not far off. Is not that one of the lessons which the snowdrops teach to us who are living in the world? It is what we are, not where we are, that makes all the difference. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil," was the prayer of the tender Saviour who loves us so well that He would certainly ask for what is best for us. As we look at the pure blossoms that make our gardens so beautiful, can we feel that we are at all like the snowdrops? We can at least pray the old prayer, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Spring.

It is not often that we are all satisfied together, and find that there really is absolutely nothing to grumble at, but even that extraordinary thing does happen when the spring comes. Everybody welcomes that visitor; greeting hands are held out, and smiles are lavished upon it, and every one is ready to believe that he has found a friend. Whether it will indeed prove so or not, of course remains to be seen. But in the meanwhile we have no doubts, and we meet the new-comer with every possible manifestation of joy.

And that in itself is a good thing. It is a boon worth having, even though its only result be that it makes us more good-humoured and hopeful—that it infects us with its hilarity, and makes us genial and pleasant. Of course in the winter there is some excuse for ill-temper. Snarling is a good accompaniment to east winds, and frowns do not look very inappropriate to fog; but when the spring, with its wonderful sunshine, fills the whole earth, it is

enough to make us ashamed of our disagreeable selves, and anxious to put off sad-coloured garments of every kind. Even the children grow brighter when they go forth to gather heaps of buttercups and daisies, and as for the old people they almost grow young again, for why should not they also have a spring-time? Indeed, old and young and middle-aged almost unconsciously join in the general gladness, and with songs of thankfulness and trust swell the harmony of the world.

And these are two of the lessons which the spring should especially teach, thankfulness and trust. Has not the winter once more been smiled away from our land? Has not our Father kept His promise? Are not flowers scattered in bountiful profusion where a short time ago was only barrenness? And if all this has come to us—and how much more only our own hearts and He may know—surely our songs should be the loudest and sweetest of them all. In the Hallelujah chorus of the spring-time no voice should be silent; the doxology of nature should be sung by all nations.

And, as for trust, how can we help having that? Do we not find how powerful and how faithful is our God and Father? Do we not see how much He can and will do for us? The sunlight of spring should make us ashamed of all doubt, and teach us to be willing to say with all our hearts, "Thy will be done."

Spring time, which is the earth's resurrection day, should always make us calm and hopeful with reference to the morning which shall break for us after the sleep of death. Once assured that we too shall rise again in the gladness of that everlasting spring, what can possibly sadden us? Supposing there are passing clouds and hidden sorrows, they are only for the present. *That* spring will not know them. And soon we shall be in the land of unfading flowers.

May we all grow glad and strong in the enjoyment of this, and the anticipation of that spring.

"Azure skies in the far-off heights,
Forest-deeps with your shady glooms,
Golden meadow lands bathed in light,
Hedges heavy with hawthorn blooms,
God is your guest on these happy days,
And ye write on a myriad leaves His praise.

" There is a joy in the world to-day :
Happy children with laughing eyes
And way-worn pilgrims turn to pray,
And take the rapture in glad surprise.
A new light rests upon hearth and home,
And earth is happy, for God has come."

Spring Sadness.

MUCH is said and sung about the joy of spring. It is supposed to be a very bright and happy time, with blue skies and carpets of flowers and perfect harmony, with no such things as rough winds and cold days and pelting rains. One who should say that he did not love the spring would be looked upon very curiously, as a most extraordinary person. Beautiful warm hopeful spring is clever at winning hearts, and young and old are alike loving and leal to her. She is fully appreciated by the many whom she charms, and they are never weary of praising her. They long for her coming and rejoice at the signs of her near approach and go forth to meet her with eager footsteps and eyes full of welcome. It is as natural to love the spring as it is to love youth and beauty anywhere, and we can no more help wishing for it than for the absent friend whose very coming is the signal for pain and sorrow and regret to steal away, leaving us to the love which is the rest of life.

And yet there is such a thing as spring sadness, and it is pretty widely felt. We cannot but see, as we take our walks among men and women in this mirthful, musical time, that there are bowed heads, and sorrowful faces, and spiritless steps. The spring, with all its hilarity, cannot lift the burden from stooping shoulders, nor relieve the weary heart. The little blue-eyed flowers smile up to many who could not smile back again to them. Often, indeed, the spring makes large demands upon the endurance of the sorrowful, for it seems so unsympathetic, so mocking in its brightness. The light is positively blinding

to aching eyes, and all the joy and sweetness make the dark life darker still by the very force of contrast.

For as the years go by it is not so much the present spring which speaks to us as those which are past. We remember how many have fallen by the way who used to walk with us through the green fields, and watch the swelling or bursting buds. The violets have faded long ago and lost all their scent which dear hands gathered for us. The song of the lark is very sweet, but so many who listened with us have gone up beyond the blue skies, and are singing sweeter songs which we cannot hear.

Sometimes another conviction steals over us. It may be that we are looking at all the beautiful spring treasures for the last time. And it is wonderful how dear this toilsome troublesome life seems to us when we are about to part with it for ever. Besides, we are leaving those who are weak and fragile still in the midst of the battle, and pity them in the spring, because of the winters that are coming.

Or, spring sadness may be brought on because it throws its strong light upon the dusky things of the world. How sordid, and low, and unworthy do most of our life pursuits look in the spring-time. How hot, and dirty, and disagreeable is the counting-house, the shop or the factory. What a strange thing it seems when the sunlight is upon the river, and the sea looks like silver, and the bees and birds are flying in the air, that we should be spending the bright hours in money-getting. How dull and uninteresting are the little rooms between the four walls, when we think of the wide open country over which the scent-laden breezes blow! How dark and monotonous is life when we think of the radiance abroad!

Well, let us make the best of the spring. It *is* beautiful even if it be sad; and it should bring us many loving messages from our Father whose kind care is over all His children. The present is too good to be lost in regrets for the past or fears of any kind. Rather let us enjoy it, and be patient, and glad, and thankful, singing our songs with the birds. And let us above all solace ourselves with the thought that we are going forward to another spring,

> "Where the faded flower shall freshen,
> Freshen never more to fade,"

where we shall have our friends back again, and where our eyes "shall see the King in His beauty."

And if, notwithstanding our effort to be glad, the sadness should persistently creep over us, let us "tell Jesus" as the disciples did, and He will help us.

"Love us, Saviour, we are feeble, and we cannot walk alone,
Even though the paths before us have Thy stronger footsteps known;
Still we ask Thee for Thy presence, go with us along our way,
And the night shall change to morning, and the gloom to brightest day.

"Love us all, the young, the aged; happy hearts and souls oppressed
Turn alike to Thee, O Jesus, for a glimpse of joy and rest;
Love us, that we may not linger where the snares of sin abound,
But in safety and contentment at Thy feet, O Lord, be found.

"Love us, Jesus, we are passing ever onward to our home,
Let Thy children through the portals, outward nevermore to roam,
Gather us around Thee, near Thee, that our hearts may ache no more,
And our weary feet grow rested on the green and sunny shore."

April Showers.

How they do pelt! It is amusing upon a real April day, to sit at a window and watch the force, and what seems almost like the passion of the storms. It is not quite so amusing to be caught in them, they are so pitiless, so unrelenting, so downright drenching, that he who would moralise, or philosophise, or poetise, upon April showers, had better not attempt it out of doors. We cannot but feel exceedingly small, and helpless, and unprotected against their fury. It is like fighting with an enemy who gives us no chance; we are sure from the very first to be beaten, and our most likely reflections are those of discomfort, mixed perhaps with a little wonder about those countries in which we are told it has "rained shot and shell." What must that have been if the "rain" came

down like showers in April. Happy are we that we are pelted only with drops that bring not death, but life, that are not received with sighs, but with song.

For everybody is glad of April showers. It is a good sight to see them falling. Broad meadows receive them and drink them up eagerly. Corn fields, dressed in their new robes of vivid green, welcome them, for they bring new sources of life and strength. The trees of the forest hold up their thousands of young leaves to catch the generous drops, and after holding them for a moment shake them off again upon the expectant primroses and anemones below. All "the green things growing" welcome the showers, and the whole land is refreshed and beautified by them. The air is purer and more invigorating, the songs of the birds are sweeter, and the flowers are more beautiful after the rain. And we who watch can only look up in thankfulness to the Father, and say, "Thou visiteth the earth, and waterest it: Thou makest it soft with showers."

It is a trite saying that "Life is like an April day." It is so indeed in many respects. It is made up of sunshine and shade, cold and warmth, genial airs and pitiless rains. But it is also like the earth in April; for the showers that come are among the greatest blessings. It is not pleasant to be in an open field while the rain is beating down; it is not pleasant to have to stand defenceless and unprotected while troubles come. But just as afterward the land rejoices, so does the soul that has been disciplined by sorrow, and recovers its thankfulness. If we would have pleasant flowers to grow in our garden we must have the rain; and if we would have the "beauty of the Lord our God upon us" we must be content and thankful even for sorrow.

It is not always indeed that we can feel so when it comes. Would the flowers, we wonder, if they could speak, express their gratitude for that which makes them hang their heads? But when the worst is over, and the weight is taken away, and the roots are made more healthy, then the advantage is felt.

We can look back thankfully upon the showers of past Aprils. Only we do not so much see the reason for the present ones. Let us only be patient. Soon we shall

know better, and understand and see. And then, when the bow of promise again shines out, and we take our way over sunlighted paths, we shall sing once more, "These light afflictions which are but for a moment work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

April.

SHE comes, the month of passing smiles and tears,
The lady of the spring;
And at her greeting earth forgets its fears,
And birds begin to sing.

There is a joy beneath fair April skies,
A new-born, hearty mirth;
And songs of thankfulness to heaven arise
From hopeful sons of earth.

Grand music through the wood-cathedrals swells;
Voices of joy and love,
Sweeter than organ note, or peal of bells,
Ascend to God above.

The old, old trees seem to grow young again,
In delicate leaves arrayed,
While through their branches comes the sweet refrain,
"Trust and be not afraid:

"For He who warms and waters day by day
The valley and the lea,
And scatters flowers by thousands on the way,
Will send a spring to thee."

So we who live in April light and shade,
Pelted by frequent showers,
Grow strong again, and cannot be dismayed,
For God is sending flowers.

And while from hill and dell, and field and wood,
Arise glad hymns of praise,
We bless the Lord, for He is very good,
Who crowns with love our days.

Waiting for May.

EVERYTHING is in readiness to receive the smiling, beautiful, beloved May, the month that comes crowned with flowers. For the most part, April is cold and dull, with frosty nights and biting east winds, so that the tender blossoms are half afraid to show themselves. But toward the end of the month some warm, genial days come, and the buds that have been only waiting for a little encouragement burst into life, and the whole land seems to be garnished and beautified, and made ready for the expected guest, who will be received with every manifestation of great joy.

It is a busy, eager, happy time, a time to rise early in the morning, and go out into the fields and lanes, gaining life and health with every breath of the pure fresh air. How full of promise is every patch of ground. Well enough may the people be busy about the land—

"From morn till dewy eve."

The young corn covers the fields with tender green, and the grass in the meadows is tall enough to be moved like waves as the wind blows over it. Vegetables and fruit trees are promising many a future treat to those who love day by day to walk among them and see what progress they have made.

Our gardens are looking very beautiful with flowers. The hyacinths, waxen white, purple, pink, all colours, are shedding their sweetness upon the air; wallflowers are adding their fragrance and richness of colour; the daffodils, the polyanthus, the double white and purple

primroses, the anemones; best of all, the blossoms of plum and pear and apple trees are filling the places with beauty. Every branch is a May-bough, every tree a garland, and look where we will our eyes are delighted with the sights that meet them.

It is true that the hawthorn is not yet in blossom, but the blackthorn, the blossom of the sloe, is doing its best with its pretty simple flowers. The hedges are looking beautiful in their rapidly thickening green robes, while the banks are covered with flowers. The meadows are white and golden with daisies and buttercups, the banks are yellow with pale primroses, and cowslips and marsh marigolds meet us in our walk, while the ground in the budding wood is carpeted with pretty white anemones and rich bluebells. The trees are looking their best, not yet so thickly draped as that their splendid figures are disguised, but with the dark ivy creeping up their stems and the bright delicate young leaves bursting into life at the top.

And so the woods and the fields wait for the May. But there is no silence in their waiting. The birds are here, and their joyous songs are heard all over the land. Not only the upsoaring lark is pouring down its music, but the nightingale has come, and the cuckoo is uttering its harsh yet beloved sound. The swallows are back in their old places; the linnets and goldfinches and woodlarks, and other birds too many to mention, are holding their musical festivals all over the land, until the woodlands are turned into cathedrals.

And so everything is ready for the May. And we are waiting too. The hopefulness of joy that is in the world steals into our hearts, which are only too glad to receive it. And the May that will enter so softly with the light of the quiet morning will come to us as tenderly as to the fields and skies, with warm loving care, and health-giving touches. Surely as we sit in the sanctuary, and the sweet sounds of church bells mingle with the anthems of the birds, and say, "Praise waiteth for THEE, O Lord, in Zion, and unto Thee shall the vow be performed," we may take the day with all its gladness as an omen of happy future days. Anyway, the spring will have many lessons to teach us.

"Every leaf in every nook,
Every wave in every brook,
Chanting with a solemn voice,
Minds us of our better choice."

May we open our hearts to all such influences, and may we through all the bright May month cleave unto the Lord!

May.

MAY has come,—May, the brightest, fairest, dearest, merriest month of all the year. However unlike spring the cities and towns may be, the country is looking very beautiful. Nature has made no mistake with regard to the season. The hearty, strengthening showers and the flashes of cheering sunshine have done their appointed work, and beautiful scenes are spread before us. The "green things growing" will not look more lovely all the summer through than they do now in their vivid freshness. Every spot is covered with luxuriant life. The broad fields are vigorous and green, and full of promise for the autumn; the meadows look like large sheets of gold, they are so covered with bright yellow buttercups; the hedges are bursting into beauty, and all the land is gay and glad with flowers and song.

This indeed, is emphatically the month of flowers. The primroses and violets of last month have not yet all died away, and hosts of others have arisen to join them. The pretty delicate cowslips may be gathered in abundance; blue-bells decorate the banks, red and white campions, wild geraniums, pansies, orchises, forget-me-nots, and a hundred other flowers, many of which are favourites, will lift up their heads to greet us with loving if silent welcome, before May is gone. The fruit-trees in our gardens and orchards are beginning to cast off their blossoms, and the summer snow falls lightly upon the waving grass; but the hawthorn hedges are full of buds, which will shortly grow into gorgeous beauty of white and pink.

But to see and enjoy May fully we must go into the woods. For trees, always objects of beauty, are exceedingly beautiful now. There is great variety of colouring; some are already covered with leaves; some are as yet quite bare; some have even a number of the old brown leaves yet lingering upon them; some are white with blossom; and some are dim and dusky. The scent of the pines, mingled with or followed by that of the sweet woodruffe, or the lily of the valley, is very pleasant. The young ferns and the soft, rich, velvet-like mosses, are delightful, and very happy are they who can spend many May hours in the forest.

But May sounds are quite as enjoyable as May sights. The hum of bees and insects, the rippling of the shining river, and the whisperings of the young leaves, are soothing to the weary heart. But who shall describe the songs of the birds? The delirious sky-lark sings his best, thrushes and blackbirds fill the woods with music, and, above all, the nightingale fills even night with melody.

If only everybody could enjoy this beautiful month and all the glad things with which God fills it; if everybody could hear and obey the inviting voices, how delightful it would be for them!

Woods in May.

Oh, beautiful old forests, clad
  In new and vivid green!
On multitudes of dancing leaves
  Is spread the silver sheen;
Amid such beauty we forget
  The winter that has been.

The May has crowned the lofty heads
  Of mighty giant trees,
And gracefully they bend to catch
  The kiss of passing breeze;
The while the flowers look up and smile,
  The wayfarer to please.

The air is full of melody,
That upward, heavenward, floats,
The feathered choristers pour down
Their thrilling music notes,
And morn and evening hymns are sung
By many happy throats.

The leafy aisles on every side
With wondrous joy are rife,
And all the green and growing plants
Are bursting into life;
And in the woods our hearts forget
Earth's labour and its strife.

And so we lift our song to Thee,
Oh, Father of us all;
Thou blessest everything of Thine,
The mighty and the small,
And Thou wilt guide our feeble feet,
And answer when we call.

Nightingales.

One of the pleasures of the opening summer is the looking for and recognising old friends as they one by one appear. The first violet, the first cluster of hawthorn blossoms, the first sound of the cuckoo, the first appearance of the swallow, are all welcomed and talked of with the most pleasurable sensations. One of these signs of the summer that all watch for and greatly enjoy is the song of that sweetest of all singers—the nightingale. If a neighbour speaks of having heard it all his hearers straightway long to go off to the woods or parks, and themselves revel in the song of passionate ecstasy and plaintive or joyous melody which the nightingale pours into the silence of the night.

Wherever this bird is found it is a favourite greatly

beloved, and whose companionship is particularly appreciated and enjoyed. And the love that is given to it is not so much because of the sweetness and variety of its notes—though they are very sweet and wonderfully varied—as because of the time when it sings. There is plenty of melody in the day—the morning is full of sweet song—but the bird that can sing in the night when everything else is silent does more for us than all the rest. Those who know what it is to lie awake hour after hour, pressed down by some care that will not be thrown off, or by suffering that lays its heavy hand painfully upon the restless body, while the spirit grows more and more depressed, know better than any one beside what is the worth of the nightingale's song. Life does not seem so hard to bear when in the darkness there rises what is like heavenly music bidding the sad heart trust in God, and be not afraid while He is over all.

These sweet little birds are not the only singers in the night. There are human singers who in nights far darker than those in May, and in circumstances much more depressing, sing sweeter songs. Their language *might* be, "Wearisome nights are appointed to me; when I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise, and the night be gone?' And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." But there would be nothing cheering in that; a nightingale's song would be better, and do more good. But songs in the night are not so plaintive as to sound like dirges, are not always minors, and to be sung slowly. There is another—a jubilant, triumphant strain. "In the night *His songs* shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." "I will bless the Lord *at all times;* His praise shall continually be in my mouth." "Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, oh! my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God."

Such songs as these do good wherever they are heard. The sufferer lying on his weary couch hearing them forgets to moan, and remembers that though it is the night, the moon or stars may be shining, and the darkness is not as intense as it seemed. Such songs are contagious; others who fancied that they had no voices, or were too

afraid of the dark to sing, insensibly catch up the strain and prolong it. It awakens many echoes, until the silence is altogether broken, and the very air is vocal. And what is the best of all is that pain is really lightened, and sorrow stolen away by music that has come from the heart of the singer.

Let all who can sing in the night. You do not know how far your song may float, nor what messages of peace and hope it may carry. You weep sometimes that you cannot go out into the field and fight the Lord's battles, cannot even trim the vines, or sow and water the good seed for the Master's pleasure. Never mind, you may do something greater still if you can sing in the night. *He* will hear, and be pleased with the spirit that in Him can be happy even at night time. And they will hear you—the weary, restless wakers of whom there are so many, and your singing may hush them to sleep, or soothe them to quiet, and make them glad with the music of the Saviour's name.

"They may forget the singer,
They will not forget the song."

Sing, then, as sweetly as you can. Be God's nightingales amid the darkness and discord of the world, and you will be doing work that might employ an angel's powers, and even here, so far from the land you love, you will be rehearsing for the grand festivals which the harpers are holding, where they sing of Moses and the Lamb.

June Flowers.

WE dream of June all the year. And in our dreams we are ever looking upon skies whose deep blue is undisturbed, and unshaded by any but the very lightest and most fleecy of clouds, upon sunny landscapes where hills and valleys, meadow-lands and forests are perpetually bathed in light, where flowers smile from under every hedge-row, and on every river brink, and where nothing

but rest and beauty, and warmth of love and joy meet the eyes. In our dreams, too, the world is full of music; everything is singing from the smallest insect to the greatest man, for there is so much happiness that it cannot all be carried in silence. So that in different voices, in various tones, but still in one harmonious chorus, the world rings with the universal song, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever."

Can anything equal the gorgeous beauty of this month—the month of roses? Wherever in all the country we turn our eyes there are the green tints which are so cool and refreshing to look at. There is not a spot of bank, or hedge, or meadow but is full of wonders. The wild flowers are too many to be counted, and the scent which is borne upon the summer air brings the greatest delight to those who for the most part of the year are toiling and moiling among the houses and dusty streets. We can feast our eyes and ears, and all the senses we have, as we walk abroad, for this is the harvest month of the flowers, and the jubilee of the birds.

The trees are never more beautiful than now, when they are in full dress. The woods, always attractive places, are delightful now, for the shade is grateful after the heat of the open fields. It is true that the spring flowers have all faded, or can only be found in some corner almost hidden by the long grass; but in place of violets, primroses, and bluebells we have others scarcely less pretty, and an abundance of graceful fern leaves. The birds, too, fill the woods with music. The mavis, and merle, and woodlark sing their sweet even-songs; the turtle-dove coos as plaintively as ever; and the willow-warbler makes us think of the swallow, the sparrow, the chaffinch, and the whitethroat as it mocks the songs of these birds. All day long, but especially in the mornings and evenings, the birds sing their sweet lays of love and trust in the Great Father's ear.

The meadows are very beautiful as the tall grass waves in the breeze, soon to be cut down. Before the ruthless scythe spoils their beauty it is well to examine and notice the different flowering grasses. If looked at under a microscope, there is not a blade but strikes us with wonder.

They look at first sight as we walk through the narrow meadow-paths all alike, and none particularly interesting; but really they have not only most elegant forms but splendid colours also. The tottering grass, the silky bent grass, the fox-tail grass, and many others, are worth not merely glancing at but carefully looking into.

Many flowers may now be found by, and even on, the water. The flags with their yellow flowers are beginning to show themselves, the pure white lily lies on the top of the quiet wave, and the water ranunculus is exhibiting its green flowers. On the bank the forget-me-not, the meadow-sweet, the flowering-mustard, and the harebell are growing in luxuriance.

But the roses—who shall describe them? The wild ones are beautiful as they hang about the hedges, but those of our gardens are past description. The cream-coloured, the pure white, the pink, the scarlet, the crimson, are each so superb that we do not know from which to choose our favourites. These and the geraniums, to say nothing of the hosts of other flowers, are enough to make us wish that June would always last.

During this month, too, many beauties among the insect tribe may be looked for. The grasshopper, the green beetle, and the dragon-flies may, perhaps, be passed over when there are so many bright-hued butterflies attracting attention; but, indeed, we cannot go out and look about without seeing how good is everything that God has made.

> "Crowds of bees are busy with clover,
> Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet,
> Crowds of larks at their matins hang over,
> Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet."

And shall not we, who have so much more reason to do so, thank Him too?

July.

If at any time during the year nature could make us calm and contented it would surely be in July. It seems to be a time of peace and rest and happy dreams, when we neither wish to look back upon a summer faded, or forward to a spring to come, but when for once the present is so fair and brilliant that we are altogether satisfied with it. If only it could be everybody's holiday-month what a bewitching time it would be! If people could forget shops and factories, and counting-houses, and market-places, and lose sight of the fact that there are such things as machines, and scales, and needles, and pens, and tools of any kind for a few days only, then, indeed, the pleasure might be complete. As it is, it is good to think of and to see the streams of excursionists that are constantly going from the hot and busy town to the green and fragrant country where there are sights and sounds to delight the dullest hearts. There surely is no month like July for holidays and recreation. It is true that the kisses of the sun are sometimes rather too fervent to be agreeable; but it is not difficult to hide away from him, for do not the trees hold out inviting arms, and is it not delicious to rest in the cool silence of the forest?

Our Saxon forefathers called this month the *foliage month*, and now indeed the leaves are in their fullest splendour, and exhibit a sober richness that is altogether enchanting. But though we cannot but admire the perfect beauty of the giant trees, as from a distance we look almost with awe upon their size and strength, it is under them that we love to be. The moss-cushions are so inviting, the sweetness of scent from the pines and the limes, the cool fannings of the graceful ferns, and the flecks of golden light that are dropped about here and there, the loving voices of the birds, and the almost ocean music with which all the trees together chorus their welcome to the refreshing breeze, as well as a thousand other delights, conspire to render the "merrie" but peaceful greenwood a most enjoyable place.

Then there is scarcely a yard of space in all the fields

and lanes that is not beautiful as a dream. The cornfields are covered with precious wheat, delighting the eye, bearded barley bowing before the wind, and oats shaking their tresses without either scorn or affectation in the movement. There are whole acres gorgeous with scarlet poppies and yellow hawkweeds. There are miles of hedges beautiful with roses, and wild hops, and traveller's joy, and white convolvulus, and privets, and alder-blossom, and honeysuckle. Even dry banks are brightened with golden cistus, and waste places are decorated with fox-glove and mullein, borage and pimpernel; and as for the streams, what with water-lilies, and sedges, and rushes, and forget-me-nots, they are indescribable.

Nor must we forget among the refreshing things of July the showers that sometimes fall. They may be accompanied by flashes of lightning and grand thunder-peals, the big drops may fall upon the leaves with a force that almost makes them shrink; but we cannot see how every thirsty thing drinks eagerly from the down-pouring fountain without singing, or at least thinking—

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

We often hear of landscapes and seascapes; but nothing much is said of *skyscapes*. And yet why not? They are not to be surpassed by either of the others, and July is a capital time to admire them. Heath and daisies, and curious stones, are well worth looking at, but so are fleecy clouds, and the picture of hills and valleys, cities, and sombre wildernesses, which, to the eye of fancy, seem to be spread out above us. Then what magnificent sunrises and sunsets there are, what splendid effects of blues and crimsons, purples, and greys; and what clear shinings of moon and stars!

Perhaps it would be well for all of us to look up! Surely we cannot help loving our Father very much when He has been so bountiful in His love toward us! And we can scarcely even in July help lifting a wistful gaze, and wondering what the beyond must be, where is our Father's house and our everlasting summer.

The Hay Harvest.

THERE are some words that are pictures in themselves. One of these is *haymaking*. To see it is to see in imagination green hills and lovely valleys, bees and birds, flowers and sunshine. Haymaking! We are away from dusky rooms, and heavy books; away from the sounds of vehicles upon noisy streets, and all the glare and dust of the town, out in the meadows, where the scythes have moved over the nodding grasses, and laid them low, and where the women are tossing and turning the stems and leaves which the sun has already begun to dry. The air is full of sweet and subtle fragrance, and yet it is so cool and refreshing that tired faces enjoy being kissed by it. The sun is shining brightly in the deep blue sky, but fleecy clouds are playing before it, and their soft shadows steal across the meadows. Only sounds that are harmonious and soothing come to the ear. There is a clear river flowing on whose banks the forget-me-nots are growing, and in whose waters are wonderful reflections of sky-peaks and mountains. Around and about are tall, strong trees, with graceful branches or dense masses of leaves. And in the distance are fields of waving wheat, and whitening oats, and bearded barley. Everywhere there is a softened splendour, and a quiet restfulness that is very grateful to the tired nerves and weary hearts of city-dwellers.

This is the picture that is conjured up in the mind by the word "haymaking." And no doubt it has come between many a hard-working man and his ledger, and many a toiling woman and her work, making them long for the reality, and the chance of listening to whispering leaves and lying upon the cut grass. For everybody loves the country when the days are warm, and we cannot help preferring its beauties to the most gorgeous scenes of the town.

We suppose there never is a haymaking without results. Of course the first and greatest is that plenty of sweet, nutritious food is secured for the cattle during the coming winter; so that, looking up, we can again say, "The eyes

of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season." Plenty of hay is a thing to be very thankful for in our land, where so much depends upon it.

But, besides this material good, there are many people who, every year, "make hay while the sun shines." An observant person, walking through the hay-meadows, especially about twilight, will be surprised to notice how frequently he meets or passes couples, who appear to have most interesting things to say to each other. And it will be seen that for the most part there is a peculiar brightness in the faces of these pairs of individuals. It may, of course, be caused by the colours of the sunsets, which are singularly beautiful at this time of the year; and it may be caused by the subjects of the conversations, which are evidently so engrossing.

"The heaving sea, the distant hills,
The waning sky, the woods,
With melancholy musings fill
The swelling heart that broods"

at sunset; so perhaps it is this "melancholy musing" which so transforms the faces of the loiterers in the hay meadows. There is, however, nothing of this sort in the children. Haymaking is a splendid time for them, or at least it would be if farmers had not such an inconvenient dislike to having their haycocks pulled to pieces for the purpose of covering the children up. As it is, the meadows are large, and nobody notices how loudly they scream with delight, nor how easy it is to throw one another down upon the soft rows. Those of us who have left childhood's games far behind, and have seen many hay harvests, must needs have some pensive thoughts of those who were with us in those other days, but who are far enough away now. But, happily, all sweet things of the summer time, all bright skies, and fresh breezes, all fair flowers and glorious sunsets, fill us with most consoling hopes of the home-land toward which we are making our way.

"No shadows yonder,
All light and song;
Each day I wonder,
And say, How long
Shall time me sunder
From that dear throng?"

So while the young are rejoicing in their youth many others are glad to think that even the hay harvest is a sign that the time which lies between them and their rest is growing shorter.

Parched Meadows.

EVERYTHING else looks beautiful. The corn-fields covered with plentiful crops wait for the reapers to cut down the ripened grains. The trees are resplendent in summer loveliness, looking their very best, while the myriads of leaves upon them having come to full perfection, but showing no sign of decay, win the eyes of the tourist to dwell upon them with a pleasure that has an element of repose in it too. The broad rivers and narrow streams move peacefully along, while the green leaves and bright flowers of the water-lilies lie upon the surface, and blue forget-me-nots still look like loving eyes out of the tall plants growing on the banks. The hedges begin to be adorned with scarlet berries, and the wild convolvulus clings about the green hawthorn bushes. The orchards are pictures of beauty and prosperity, for the bunches of ripe fruit hang temptingly from the trees. The forests are silent and shady, and beneath the spreading boughs of the giant trees are lovely spots of green moss, looking like luxuriant couches inviting to repose. And above them all there is the soft moonlight, or the glorious beauty of the sunrise, or the calm majesty of blue skies and fleecy clonds and perfect sunshine, or the melting softness of the summer sunset. Everything is beautiful except the meadows, and they are white and parched.

Is it not often the case in this world some one thing comes to prevent the beauty which is almost but never quite perfect?

What splendid sights we may see in the young life that is round about us! Very fair faces, with clear eyes and smiling lips, and blooming complexions, with well-shaped heads and stately and elegant forms. We look upon them

thinking that, after all, no landscape, however fair, can equal their beauty. And besides, here are no parched meadows. But if we go a little nearer, and pass over the merry laughter, and look deeper than the ready smiles, shall we not too often find in the character traces of discontent, and worldliness, and selfishness, which are very much like parched meadows?

Are there no parched meadows in the Christian Church? There is so much that looks fair, and green, and beautiful to the eye. There is so much prosperity that we begin to sing our harvest songs, and to believe in the on-coming of abundant plenty. And yet, does not the love of some wax cold? Is there not a spirit of worldliness, and a great want of prayerfulness, and the spirituality which it engenders? Are there not barren places which spoil the general beauty which should be seen upon the enclosed spot, the Garden of the Lord?

Indeed, there are parched meadows where they ought not to be. Let us pray that showers from heaven may fall, and that upon the waste places may come an aftermath of beauty and fruitfulness, for in our lives we need have no barrenness.

Is there not a promise which says of our Lord, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth?" What can we say but "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly?"

"Come down, O, mighty Saviour, Thy children thirst for Thee,
Where should be summer greenness there arid deserts be;
And though Thy sun is shining, and the cloud-hills rise above,
The world is dead and barren without Thy touch of love.

"Come down, come down as showers, come with refreshing might,
And move upon our darkness, and say, Let there be light;
Come, for sweet flowers of healing shall grow around Thy feet,
And souls new-born with rapture arise the Lord to greet."

The Promise of the Harvest.

A FEW days of sunshine accomplish many things. They change the whole face of the earth into brightness and beauty, and cause even timid, mistrustful man to "take heart again." We all love the sunshine, but the fields and the flowers and the birds seem to enjoy it even more. Only let the blue sky be cloudless for a few hours, and the sun do its glorious work in uninterrupted strength, and how grand all growing things become. How gorgeous are the colours of red, white, and yellow on every roadside; how happy are all things that grow or float or sing!

All the fields that are covered with growing crops have a wonderfully interesting story to tell. To the sinking hearts that know how precarious are all temporal affairs, and that even have misgiving as to whether their bread shall really be given, and their water certainly be sure, the fields of waving corn changing from green to yellow say, "Fear not; trust in the Lord, there shall be a bountiful harvest." All things that were necessary have taken place. The hard frosts locked up the land that it might have rest. The snow fell and covered it with a soft white mantle. The gentle spring winds blew, and soft rains fell and some sunny days came. Then the corn, green as blades of grass, crept up, and looked towards the heavens. As it grew and required nourishment, heavy dews and long-continued rains fell, and the corn swelled and increased. And now it is beginning to grow ripe, and we know that in due time the joy of the harvest shall be felt in the land.

God requires us to live by faith; but He keeps the faith alive and strong in our hearts by many promises and signs. He does not require very long and patient waiting without giving us encouragement. Even in the darkest night there is some faint glimmer which bids us hope for and expect the dawning. Even in the coldest, dullest springs, there are flowers and green things growing which suggest bright and cheerful dreams of the coming summer.

May not these promises of the harvest speak to us of a yet better and fuller joy? Sometimes for us, in every respect,

> "The day is cold, and dark and dreary,
> It rains, and the wind is never weary."

And such days are often neither brief nor few in number. What is to keep the sad and the sinking heart from despair while these last but God's promises of brighter and better times? When present comforts fail, and the sky is overcast, that is the time for Hope to fulfil its blessed mission. After all, this world is not an altogether cheerless place. The summer is as long as the winter, and joy is as plentiful as sorrow. God has made gladness to abound, and those who are the lowest in the depths of trouble should remember that there are heights which they have yet to climb. Is it not proverbial that "After the storm comes the calm?" Then let us be patient and hope for what is in the way. Let us cheer ourselves with the thought that though "Sorrow may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning." God shall bless us; He will put a new song in our mouths. He will make the wilderness to be glad and the desert to blossom as the rose. He will lighten our darkness, and lead us out into pleasant places where are green pastures and still waters. Already He has done so again and again, and to-day His loving-kindness is the same as ever.

But the full joy of the harvest is not promised to us in this world. We have to wait for it. To some of us there will be a rapid ripening and ingathering; and to some the patience of hope for a long time. But to all of us who can look up to Him, and through our Saviour call Him Abba, Father, the harvest will come. In the land where they hunger no more, neither thirst any more, where the sun does not light upon them nor any heat, they know what the joy of harvest means. It is there that may be heard

> "The shout of those who triumph,
> And the song of those who feast."

Here, for a time, we have nothing but the promise. But when we look abroad, and see the manifold tokens of

the faithfulness and tenderness of our God, we may well be content with His promise.

Soon in His brighter land
Praise shall our tongues employ,
And He will satisfy our souls
With wealth of harvest joy.

Harvest Joy.

A VERY merry time in the country is the harvest time. People seem to forget the cares and sorrows of the former months and to give themselves up to the general hilarity of the occasion. The first sounds that greet our ears on awaking, next to the arrogant crowing of the cock, and the twittering of the birds, are those of light-hearted labourers who whistle as they go to their work. All the day long the sounds are pleasant ones, and when the day's toil is over, and the sweet twilight settles like a benediction upon the earth, the last things we hear are those of vesper hymns arising from happy hearts. Of course, it does not really make men and women good to live in the country, There are coarse words, and noisy jests, and ribald songs in villages as well as in towns, but it does seem almost as if the happy influences of harvest rejoicings soften even hard hearts, and make the people a little more inclined to praise God for His goodness. And certainly those who know Him as their Father may well feel devout and glad as they rest among the love-tokens which are now so profusely given to them.

We should feel thankful if we have a plentiful, bountiful, harvest. There have been many dark days ; the skies were clouded, the winds were cold, the rains fell, and those who watched the signs of the times felt that they must add the prayer—

"Let not faithless fears o'ertake us,
Let not faith and hope forsake us,"

to the ordinary one, "Give us day by day our daily bread."

But all that is over now. We see that all our fears were groundless, and that the Father cares for His children with a great and tender care, however threatening appearances may be.

Everybody should spend a day or two in the harvest field, there is so much to be learned there. Happy hearts sing for joy, and everywhere eager men, with active hands, are busy among the standing corn, laying it low with the sickle, and gathering it into barns. Pleasant sights may be seen in the country this month, the loaded wain taking the precious grain away from the fields, amid the joyous shouts of the glad multitude, the busy throng of gleaners going carefully over every part of the stubble, "gathering up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," men, women, and children rejoicing together over the ingathering of the precious fruits of the earth. Surely one thought must rush into the hearts of the people, even those who are ordinarily both thoughtless and unbelieving, "God is love, God is good."

Have times changed, or was Boaz always an exceptional man of his class, and were his reapers better men than ours? "And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Fit greeting for the harvest field, a greeting that would make work lighter and joy greater, but one which is not often heard now. Yet even in these days it is good to hear the songs of Zion sung by the reapers and the gleaners, good to hear "A day's march nearer home" rise from lips that are weary, good to hear "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" coming from the harvest field.

This good old doxology, or something like it, comes up from the Christian heart with greater intensity than ever. Well may we trust our Father and our Friend, for does He ever fail us? Has He not always been faithful, never disappointing those who have looked to Him? Oh, wonderful heart, always at leisure to listen to the cries of His children, the "Give us day by day our daily bread" which ascends to Him from all creatures which He has made! Surely some of the joy comes to Him as He looks down and sees the thankfulness and rest from care which are part of the harvest joy.

But the joy of harvest is far enough from some of us as yet. The husbandman has only worked and waited for a year. His faith has only to be exercised for a few months. But we have worked for years, and see no sign of harvest even now. We have tilled the ground, and sown the seed, and watched and weeded and watered it, and still no green blade comes up before our wistful eyes, no full ears of corn wave upon our hills. Shall we then grow weary and faint-hearted? Shall we be desponding, and lose our hope, and have no more faith? Oh, surely not while the joy of harvest is in the land. Cannot He who works such miracles, bringing from decay and barrenness such wealth of plenty, do the same for our little husbandry? Little it matters where our fields lie, or what is the seed which we have sown. There is a secret writing for us upon every ear of ripe corn which the reaper's sickle is laying at our feet: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

It is good to think that to many engaged in arduous avocations in our cities and towns a little harvest joy may be given very cheaply. Laden excursion trains passing swiftly through miles of pleasant country, where the corn is standing in sheaves, are proofs that the people enjoy the sights of the harvest. Large vans crowded with happy faces pass along the lanes; and though some of the men cannot appreciate the quiet beauties of the natural world, the fresh air, and the wild flowers, there are more who do. It is good to see tired city forms in the cornfields, and good to hear the curious questions of little children who see the wonders for the first time. Cannot those who employ numbers in factories and shops let them all have a day in the country during the merry harvest time?

The source of the harvest joy is the knowledge of the love and goodness of God to us. Thomson's words will come into our memories—

> "Think, oh grateful, think
> How good the God of harvest is to you,
> Who pours abundance o'er your flowing fields."

And, as we think of it, can we help feeling a glad confidence in His care for the future as well as a great thankfulness for His bounty in the present?

Harvest Time.

THE Master is looking for sheaves to-day
Under the summer sun;
Swiftly the seasons have passed away,
And the harvest has well begun.
What have I done with the fair long months
Which His kindness lent to me?
As He looks abroad at my fields to-day,
What will the Master see?

I was to tend them, He told me once,
And left them to my best care;
Snow and sunshine and wind and rain
I knew I could have by prayer.
Thankful I felt, and a little proud,
That the Lord should trust me so,
And I sang a song of exultant joy
As I watched the season go.

But, alas! for me and my slighted fields
Now in the harvest time!
There is nought to see but a few lean ears,
Though the year is in its prime.
Alas! for me when the Master comes!
How shall I meet His gaze?
What will He say when He sees my shame
At thought of the wasted days?

There are golden sheaves upon others' fields,
There is plenty of rich ripe grain:
I can hear their songs, who, for long, long months,
Were toiling in care and pain.
They have no fear of the Master's frown,
But *I*, when He comes this way,
Shall almost tremble to hear His voice,
Or silently creep away.

Yet no,—I will stay; for His love is great,
And patient His tenderness;
He will see I am sorry, and oh, perhaps,
He will pity, forgive, and bless.
If He take not the fields away from me,
I will thankfully toil and wait;
It may be that I shall have sheaves one day,
Though my harvest tarry late.

A Festival of Ingathering.

THERE are some things that never grow old, and the joy of harvest is one of them. In our white, shaven fields, the brown faces of reaping men and gleaning women are lit up with joy as intense as that which illuminated the dark eyes of Eastern men and maidens who kept the feast of the ingathering in the olden time. And round about our closely packed stacks, or in the large kitchens where good cheer abounds, as well as in the stately sanctuaries decorated with greenery and luscious fruit, may be heard, in happy, peace-environed England, the old Hebrew songs —"*Praise the Lord from the earth: fire and hail; snow and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling His word: mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: creeping things, and flying fowl: kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: both young men, and maidens; old men and children: let them praise the name of the Lord: for His name alone is excellent; His glory is above the earth and heaven. He also exalteth the horn of His people, the praise of all His saints; even the children of Israel, a people near unto Him. Praise ye the Lord.*"

Even we have kept our fasts, have had our solemn days of confession and prayer, have worn sad faces, and kept our eyes, heavy with tears, upon the ground. But *now?* We look up to the calm blue skies, and away to the many-tinted foliage of forest trees, to smiling valleys sleeping in beauty, and hills bathed in light, and read nothing but

the Father's love everywhere. We keep our festival with singing and rejoicing, and although our feast of tabernacles is seldom kept, and no green branches are cut down and waved in triumph, as we think of ourselves as pilgrim emigrants passing through a strange land, yet we too have our national rejoicings, and each for himself has a vivid and wonderful history before him as he says in secret exultation, "The Lord is *my* Shepherd—*I* shall not want."

There is reason enough why we should keep the feast. Our fields have not been trodden down by the ruthless onslaught of invading armies. Our brothers have not gone from our homes singing maddening war-songs to inflame their hearts with hate under pretence of heroic patriotism. Our lines of railway, not cut by an enemy, or choked with thousands of dead and wounded, are left free to happy hosts of pleasure-seekers who have their seven days of rest after the labours of the ingathering. Our cathedrals are not turned into hospitals, but are sacred and silent until the harvest anthems fill their domes.

"Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

But is there no reason why there should arise misgivings in our heart even while we keep our harvest festivals? God has blessed us; but what return have we made? Do all people serve Him with one heart and mind? Is there no sin in our land despoiling the cities and towns around which lie our fruitful fields? If, indeed, the destroying angel has been bidden to pass over us, and our homes are left safe and happy, is it not the more reason why we should know ourselves as unprofitable servants, undeserving of the least of God's many mercies? And if there is any exultation in our songs, let there at least be no boasting, but only a deep consciousness that in the mercy of God alone we have any reason to rejoice.

And it would be well in our festivals, whether they are only the old-fashioned harvest-homes, or the thanksgiving-service held in the little village chapel, or the more impressive ceremonies among the great congregations of the churches in our land, to make offering unto the Lord, that others less highly favoured may have some of our joy.

The Sea.

It is quite impossible to get tired of some things. They are ever fresh and new; they present some glory unseen before, even when we gaze upon them for the thousandth time. If we have been learning lessons of them all our lives, we may yet find something that we never understood before. If they are quite old friends, tried and trusted for years, they yet possess all the vigour and fascination of eternal youth, and win us at last as at first by their wonderful beauty and variety of charms. But this is the case with God's works only. Man's noblest performances are apt to pall upon us, and having seen them a few times we do not care to behold them again. We grow weary, and still cry out for something new. It must be God's handiwork which never tires, and which the more we look at it the more we admire and love it.

Do we not feel this while watching the waves of the sea, as they either dash up among the rocks, or fall gently upon the smooth sands? We cannot grow tired of seeing them. They are pages of a grand book which we cannot learn by rote. It does not matter how many times we look at them: the stories they tell, the songs they sing, are ever interesting and delightful. We looked at them last night, but they are quite as fresh this morning, and as full of wonder as ever. The colour of the sea never fades. It is as green, as blue, as white as ever. And the changing hues are as interesting as they were when we first looked at them. Neither does the music diminish in tone. The grand chorus is as effective as ever; the voices of the waves do not wear out, nor lose their brilliancy, though they have sung to ever-varying audiences since they first sent back their responses with glad reverence to the Creator when "the gathering together of the waters called He seas: and God saw that it was good." As for the "wonders of the deep," are not the children to-day as delighted to heap up sand, and collect shells, and look for sea anemones, and watch the shoals of little shrimps springing into the air, and gather sea-weeds, as were those children who stood on these very shores in

those wonderful, misty times when they probably wore paint, instead of muslins, while their clever fathers were engaged on Salisbury Plain, and other places, heaping together the "old stones" which were predestined to be puzzles to all future generations? The waves have not altered, the shores are very much the same, the living things that inhabit the deep have gone on multiplying ever since, the great wide "waste of waters" is as unfathomable to our minds as ever. Man's works may and do change: God and His works are abiding.

May we go each summer and learn afresh the profound lessons of the sea! It is as treacherous as ever; men trust their lives to it, and are engulfed in its waters; it disregards human life, and every year is unsatisfied unless some sacrifices are offered to it. And it says to-day, as it has said for ever, "Prepare to meet thy God."

It is as health-giving as ever. Men grow strong walking on its shores, where the pure airs reach them, and the beauty delights them. And still it yields its thousands of fishes to the wants of men, and still it says, "The eyes of all wait upon Thee; Thou givest them their meat in due season."

It is as restless as ever. Still it moans and cries, still it rushes up and returns, still its mighty bosom beats and pants, and is never satisfied. It seems always hungry, always wanting something; and still it says to us, "Such is life."

Let us learn this lesson. Our life is like the sea. It cannot rest, cannot be still, but it flows toward the eternal shore, it touches with its eager lips the green meadows of the summer-land, and soon we shall be carried thither, where at last rest and satisfaction will come to us, where "there is no more sea."

The Sands by the Sea.

Is there anything in all the world that can give such rest to the work-weary as sitting idly upon the sands, and dreamily watching the waves as they fall upon the shore? We think not. It is the very place and occupation to make one forget that life is earnest and full of straining demands upon one's time and strength. There seems positively nothing to do but enjoy; and while the sun shines, and the soft breezes play, and the waters make sweet music, this should not be so very difficult. It makes, we think, a great difference to the enjoyment of a holiday as to whether or not it has been fairly earned. Those whose lives are spent in holiday-making look dull, and uninterested, and bored, even on the sands; but those who give their years to hard work, and only get a few weeks in the year for rest, can drink to the full of the pleasure of every pleasant scene that comes. And it is good to think how many there are each summer who need rest, because they are weary, not of killing time, but of downright hard toil, who will flock to the different towns and villages around our coast, and enjoy the recreation they deserve.

There is something so soothing in the sound of the waves; it is like a lullaby with which a patient mother hushes her child to sleep. It seems to say that after all there is nothing in this world which should fret us so much, and rob us of all rest. We are foolish to let the things that happen about us affect us as we do. We should take life more easily. Why not? It is only like the tide; it ebbs and flows, ebbs and flows regularly enough. Is it not absurd to worry and lament and wear ourselves out with weeping because it happens to be the ebb, and the sands are left bare and desolate? If only we have patience and wait, the waters will come up again, and the sands will be covered, and the prospect be full of beauty. Surely then we need not frown and grow old before our time in making useless lamentation. And yet how many, as they listen to the lesson of the waves, and give themselves time to think, will be conscious that this is exactly what they are doing! It will be well if all who recognise the fact

learn a little wisdom while on the sands, and resolve that they will more quietly wait and let things take their course, or rather be content that He shall do as pleaseth Him who "holdeth the waters in the hollow of His hand."

There is something in the wide expanse of the sea that must remind us of eternity. The little strip of land upon which we stand seems to grow smaller and narrower still. After all, it is so little that it cannot be of half the consequence we make it. What matters is not the petty parts we play on the side of the boundless sea, it is what is on the other side. And so as we watch the children at their play, and listen to the waves as they come plunging in, there must be a great want felt, a great yearning in our hearts, if we cannot look to the Beyond and feel that we have some part in it. Happy are they who have heard a voice soft and gentle, and more precious than all beside, saying, "Come unto Me," and have responded, "Oh, Lamb of God, I come!" Surely, if all knew the wonderful peace of communion with the Christ who walks upon the waters now, as He did of old, there would not be so many sad faces and listless feet. Oh, if they did but know Him, and could enter into His rest! One cannot but turn away from the music, and fashion, and glare, to pray that something better may be given to the hungry, weary multitudes, who "spend their money for that which is not bread," even on the sands.

Summer Gladness for Sunday-school Teachers.

If we saw the wondrous beauty with which God clothes the world, if we would only stand still and let the summer gladness flow into our hearts, we should nevermore call the world "a wilderness," "a solitary place," "a vale of tears." Let us leave the towns and cities for awhile, and mount the hills, or stand by the shore; let us rest in the luxurious shade of the green forest, or among the ripening

corn; and surely in such places only one thought will fill our hearts, "Thy beauty has made me glad."

Is it not a good sight to see the many thousands of Sunday-school children who are enjoying their annual treat at the present time?

How they revel in the sights and sounds of the glorious summer! A group of trees throwing their cooling shadows on the velvet sward is quite a palace of delights to them.

"The cowslip on the river's brim" is more than a yellow cowslip to those whose eyes are seldom gladdened by sight of growing flowers; and the luxuriousness that the country presents fills them with thoughts of awe as well as gladness. Ah, it is very good to take the children and young people away from the town to where they can for themselves examine the wonderful works of God, and learn the lessons which He teaches by them. When we reflect how little of this summer gladness comes to the children, we shall surely do what we may to prepare the way for them to enjoy it, at least once or twice during the season.

But by this means, as well as every other, let us pray that they may be led to the feet of the Saviour. Is there no danger of our forgetting the most important in the less? We cannot do much for them here. We gladly do what we can, but we cannot make their homes large and healthy; we cannot give them ease instead of labour, joy instead of sorrow, lightheartedness instead of care, intelligence instead of darkness and ignorance. We can after all only do a little, though we spend our days and nights in the endeavour. But if we can lead them to the Saviour, if by any means we can win their hearts to Him, and bring them to feel how mighty is His love, how deep His tenderness, how strong His power, then indeed we have done that which is better than all beside. If through our teaching they become Christian men and Christian women, little indeed it matters what else they are; their lives shall be bright, and noble, and beautiful to the very end; there shall be summer gladness in them even when the flowers have all faded, and the leaves dropped off the trees.

But what shall we say if we are idle, and give them no

earnest words, or loving counsels, do not pray for them or beseech them to come to Jesus? Then we shall assuredly hear the sad wail fall upon our ears, startling us into self-reproach and filling us with regret—"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Oh, let us work while it is day, let us be really in earnest, until they consecrate this glorious season by bringing all their budding flowers to Him, by laying upon His altar their young and loving hearts. God grant to all Sunday-school teachers a taste of this great summer gladness.

The Lingering Summer.

A PLEASANT thing for us all is a summer that seems as loth to leave us as we are to let it go. It is delightful for those who are still keeping holiday by lake and mountain, and are glad to have the wonderful picture of lifting mists and glowing sun-rises a little longer. It is good for the toilers of our land, to whom summer is a beloved friend, and winter, with its stint and hardness, something like a dreaded foe. And it is even better still for those whose lives are fading away as summer roses, who are only kept here by the genial sunshine and soft airs, and who must pass away when the chilling winds and wet days bring the melancholy season of the year. Indeed, it must be felt that the lingering summer is a good and helpful thing.

Has the country been more beautiful all the year round than it is then? How blue are the skies, how green the meadow-lands! and what wonderful autumn glory is upon the forests! We cannot tire of the soft and varied tints, or the deep, rich colouring of every landscape. The trees are always beautiful, whether brown and bare, or clothed with the vivid greenness of spring, or fantastically covered by the feathery snow, but they are most beautiful with the October brown and gold upon them. And there are still some wild flowers growing at their feet, there are sweet-scented violets upon the sunny bank, a

few primroses smile up into the face of this second summer with a welcome no less tender than was accorded to the first, and, as for the daisies and buttercups, they are as cheerful and self-asserting as ever, while plentiful fruit of black and scarlet berries hang upon the hedges.

It is true that the close of the summer is more silent and subdued than the beginning. There is no sweet though turbulent music made by the songs of emulating birds; there are only a few left to finish the concert of melody. And there is a general air of quiet, which seems almost like resignation, which is but anticipatory of the dark days which are to come. And after all, the end of the summer is a time of great peace and rest. The work is done, the toil over, and the harvest is gathered in. The hands may be folded for a little time, and the tired eyes may rest themselves by looking upon the beauties that lie outside of the working fields.

The lengthened summer, with its calmness and repose, is so like the evening of a good and gentle life. Less silent than when in the morning of youth songs of exultation rung out from the merry lips, there is still a little music while the weaker voice tells of "goodness and mercy." There is no longer the brightness and dazzling glory of the advent of summer; but there is instead the ripe rich fruitfulness which is better to see than garlands of blossom. They were the promises, this is the fulfilment; they were hopes, this is fruition. And though the days grow short, and the shadows long, there is unclouded beauty upon the peaceful forms which have weathered the storms and borne the burden and heat of the day, and are now ready to be folded in sweet and restful sleep. Happy indeed are those whose autumn is only the lingering summer. There are some lives in which the October is only full of angry winds and pelting showers, and dull grey skies!

Should not they who have said, "My summer is over, I have but the bleak and fading autumn now," but to whom the sunshine and clear skies are sent instead, be thankful for the mercy thus shown to them? We must not forget the surprises with which our Father delights His children. Is He better to us than our fears? Let us at least appre-

ciate His goodness. "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever."

There is something very enchanting in unexpected happiness. Joy cannot be otherwise than joyous, and it is a great thing to have it when we have been looking forward to it, and dreaming of it, and counting the hours until it come. But it is better still when we are surprised by the visit of the sunbeam-giving guest; when we have dared neither to hope nor dream of its coming, but giving ourselves up in resignation to the inevitable, have sung our "Too late" with as few tears as possible. Then what a gladness there is in the flashing of light upon unexpected places, in the shining out of a love which we never hoped to see, in the sweet strains of the joy-music which we thought was for ever silenced! Somebody has said that there is no happiness like a late-in-life happiness. And, indeed, it is true that none is so precious to the heart, perhaps, because the heart that has waited long is the best prepared to receive it.

We get mistaken sometimes, wise as we are! Now and then things are worse than we expected. We looked for gladness, and have sadness instead; we expected light, and find only darkness. But generally it is the reverse of this. Our Father is better to us than our fears, the world is fairer than we knew, there are pleasures for us that we had not dared even to hope for.

And when the summer stays, when the sun shines, when the warm breeze creeps in at our windows, and the moths and butterflies still sport in the air while all the world seems filled with joy and gratitude, we ought to regret that we have hoped so little at our Father's hands!

Perhaps we are growing old. How sad it is to lose our youth! Never again shall we have the joy that made it so fair to us. We were loved then, but now the friends of our youth are dead, and the strength and buoyancy we knew then have departed from us. And the sadness creeps over us. We let our eyes grow dim with weeping over the past, we waste our little remaining strength in repining and fears.

But how often does God send a second summer even to those who only expected winter. New friends come, once again the sweet sound of a voice intoned with tenderness

comes into our hearts, bright eyes look into ours, strong hands, whose touch is kindly, take our own. What then? It is only a second summer come unexpectedly; our Father is better than we looked for—He will not let us grow too early sad.

We go down into a dark valley where there are shadows that frighten us. Here, at least, we expect only gloom, and cold, and death. But how often God sends His light at eventide! Some find that the end of the day is the brightest, the warmth of the last summer hours the most delightful. So may it be with us, and the second summer, which comes when all earthly things begin to fade, be but the introduction to a brighter, fairer summer which we shall spend on the "evergreen shore."

A Second Summer.

BEAUTIFUL summer-time! still does it linger,
Bathing in sunlight the heather and wood,
Brightening each spot which the touch of God's finger,
Passing, has rendered all beauteous and good.

Autumn has come, but the summer is staying
As a friend who has blessed us is loth to depart,
We look out with glad eyes where the sunbeams are playing,
And pleasure and happiness steal to the heart.

The days glide away, but they cannot bereave us
Of greenness, and beauty of verdure, and flowers;
The summer must love us, it cannot yet leave us
To winter, and darkness, and pleasureless hours.

Not yet are we hearing the mourning and sighing
Of sad autumn winds through the verdureless trees;
For what can be pensively fading and dying
With sun on the meadows and song in the breeze?

Oh beautiful summer-time! thou art but telling
God's goodness again in unwearying story,
And what can we do but His goodness be swelling,
And pouring our song to His honour and glory?

For e'en as His hand is the summer repeating,
So joy that we thought was swift gliding away
Shall come yet again, till, with hearts gladly beating,
We shall love Him and trust while we scarcely could pray.

Brown Woods.

THE woods are always beautiful. In midwinter, when the snow is piled upon the great trees, when the frost has well-nigh killed all the green things that generally luxuriate there, and changed the scene completely, even then there is always beauty and interest to be found. The spring with its thousands of pale primroses, purple violets, and delicate anemones, and the summer with its unnumbered blossoms of blue-bells, and cowslips, and meadow-sweet, and hundreds of other flowers, can speak for themselves. There is scarcely a day in the seasons during which a ramble through the woodlands would not be productive of some new beauty, and bring some fresh emotion of joy and love.

But, after all, nothing can equal the woods in autumn. The gorgeousness of colour, the variety of tint, the splendid paintings of the great Artist which are before our eyes, the ever-varying, ever-deepening hues of a myriad of leaves, all these things combine to make the autumnal wood beautiful beyond description. And perhaps a great deal of it is in our own eyes. It is wonderful how beautiful a thing becomes when it is about to leave us. It is the old story, "Blessings brighten as they take their flight." We never knew how precious were some of our gems until we discovered that we had dropped them in the sands, and so lost them irrecoverably. We never

knew that we were entertaining an angel until his shining wings were spread for departure. We took the summer days quite as a matter of course; we were so used to the cloudless skies, and undimmed sunshine, to brilliant days and star-lit nights, to the rustle and music of the graceful leaves, and the jubilant chorus of all happy things, that we forgot to notice them, and dwell upon them, and appreciate them fully. But the glory of the summer is passing now. The days are short, and the nights are long and cold. The wind has taken another song, the airs are all pensive and pathetic; and even the marvellous beauty of the autumnal woods is saddening to our spirits because it is the beauty of decay. So there is no longer any lethargy in our enjoyment, and a few hours of sunshine, or a panorama of changing leaves, moves our hearts with a strange new love, and causes us to rejoice in the brown woods.

Is it not often so? Love of place and country is not always strong within us. The little corner in which our daily work is done does not always seem as bright as it might do. We look even upon the clusters of trees, and shadowed valleys, and lofty hills, until we have little appreciation of their beauty. But there comes a time when the finger of Providence beckons another way, and we have to leave the snug nest, where we have gone in and out so long. And then what a sudden increase of love comes to us. We see then that there can be no trees so fine and beautiful, no valleys so smiling, no river so clear and bright. What has come to the place that we cling to it so fondly? What new light has touched it? What new glory rested upon it? Ah! it is not that. The wood is brown, the summer is departing, and therefore it is beautiful.

What do we say of the friends who have been always about us? We are so used to them that we bear with them, and love them, and are even kind to them in a commonplace sort of way. But a change has come—a change that will carry them out of our sight. And now—oh! how dear they are to us! What light is in their eyes! what sweet words fall from their lips! how dear is the touch of those ministering hands which shall soon be nothing more to us! *Are* they so changed? Have they

indeed become glorified, or is it that our hearts relent when the parting time draws near? Are brown woods really more beautiful than green woods, or is it only because we look on to nakedness and sterility?

How little we think of our own powers or strength during the spring and summer-time of life! The young talk of dying with calm faces and tranquil hearts, because death seems so far away from them. They can be prodigal of life with their unspent fortune of golden days. But when the limbs grow weary, when the eyes are dim, when the memory begins to fail, and strange sensations of pain come like warnings in night watches, then we suddenly see what a beautiful, what a grand thing is life! After all we say there is nothing like the sunset for glory, the autumn for beauty!

And yet I think that we shall be perfectly satisfied, though there are no *brown* woods upon "the ever green shore!"

Nutting.

But there is little time or space for serious thoughts when the wood rings with the merry sounds of a nutting party. It seems one of the impossibilities of life to gather nuts (in company) without laughing, and joking, and singing. It appears, indeed, as if woods are especially, like temples, to be filled with song. The children sing their merry rounds. Young men and maidens sing together, as a matter of course; how can they help it when their hearts are so full of music? Even the old men and women, who have sung so many songs that their voices are almost worn out, help the melody in the woods with a quavering note or two; for autumn woods are beautiful to the aged long after they have lost their enjoyment of nuts.

A few hours among the hazel-trees is capital recreation for all who can join in it. Like blackberrying, it is not a very serious business, although sometimes very serious results follow, since many a young couple who begin with

seeking nuts together go on cracking them in company ever after. But even without this excitement nutting is pleasant. It is one of the lingering delights of the summer. The air is still warm for a few hours, and, though the skies are losing their depth of colour, they are still blue. The wild flowers have not all disappeared, and there are still some attempts at song among the birds. What more is wanted to complete the joy of an autumn day, excepting agreeable society and plenty of nuts within easy reach?

Very inviting are the bunches of twos and threes which hang upon the hazel-trees, and it is worth the risk of a torn garment to get a well-filled bag or basket. For nuts are gathered not to be eaten at once, but to be stored away for the winter. Many a pleasant family gathering will there be when the nuts are cracked. In many a country home they will be kept with self-denying care until Christmas, when "the children" who used to go nutting themselves, but who are now away in distant towns having far harder nuts to crack, will be at home for their holidays to enjoy them. Not only

"Across the walnuts and the wine"

will there be friendly talk and kindly words, but in the cottage homes where the poor meet together the hazel-nuts will be enjoyed. In the meantime, let all who can do so be glad of the opportunity of spending yet another day in the woods before the frosts spoil their loveliness, not forgetting among the pleasant interchange of mirthful speech the song of praise to Him who "hath made everything beautiful in His time." But

"Not in the solitude
Alone may man commune with heaven, or see
Only in autumn wood
And sunny vale the present Deity,
Or only hear His voice
Where the winds whisper and the waves rejoice."

Very few people have a day to spare for nutting; most have returned from their holidays and settled down to work for the winter. But they, too, can sing of the loving-kindness of the Lord, and of their trust in Him. The thousands who are toiling at desk or bench, and scarcely know how the woods look, or care for the ripening of nuts, are yet occupied in a very similar way to those who do.

For, with great care and risk, and constant industry, they are toiling to accumulate stores for a coming winter. Some are piling up honours, some are heaping up wealth, others are laying by plans until they are a little more ripe and ready for use. Some intend to keep the nuts for themselves. Some provide them for their families. Some, with thoughtful faces and large hearts, dream of inviting all the world to share in their store. It is to be hoped that none are toiling in vain. There is such a thing as a nutshell full of disappointment. Let us trust, however, that those of us who are accumulating little stores may find the kernels sweet and sound. Still, there is a risk in nutting; we cannot tell until the shell is cracked what is really inside. They are the best off who do not greatly care, but who, doing their best always, have hearts fixed on higher things than any nuts that grow upon any trees of earth. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Happy are all they who are *content* to have it so.

Fog.

One indication of the passing away of the summer and the approach of winter is the fog. Of course foggy mornings are expected in November; so exactly the right things are they then that we can put up with them without any more than the ordinary remarks. But when they come in October there is every reason why, when they wrap their uncomfortable folds about us, we should both feel and speak of them. All disagreeable things are the worst at first. Proverbially the breaking of the ice is even harder than the plunge into the water. The first day of winter always strikes us more disagreeably than the last, and the foggy morning is exceedingly trying to bad-tempered people.

Of course one of the greatest of all the fog discomforts is its power of annihilation. It is a wet sponge upon the face of a pleasant picture. Last night we looked out upon

the green hills towering into the clouds, the shining river winding through pleasant meadows, tall and graceful trees in their gorgeousness of autumnal attire, a thousand beauties of green and gold and russet. This morning we look out—upon a wall of fog. Grey, wet, cold, and utterly devoid of beauty is the only thing which we can see, this heavy impenetrable curtain which is hung over everything. We cannot like it, we can but shiver at the sight of it, and patiently wait until the sun comes out in its glorious strength and smiles it all away, giving us once again our pleasant picture of blue skies, and green fields, and shining river. And we find that nothing is changed; everything is as it was; the glory was only hidden, it has not departed.

How often our lives are among the fogs. How often we awaken suddenly to find a dense cloud over everything, not a beam of the sun of joy to be seen, not a single pleasant flower, scarcely a little bit of green; the fog is everywhere, even heaven itself seems blotted out, and there is nothing but a grim, cold mass of sorrow for heart and eye. Still it is only the fog. Our Father has not blotted out our beautiful pictures. He has but hidden them for an hour or two. In a little time the Sun of Righteousness will arise, and all the fog will disperse.

A foggy morning will often cause disappointment in this way. Our very dearest friend may actually be on the other side of the street, and we cannot see him. So near, and yet so far away. We would go miles out of our way if it were necessary for the sight of the face that is only a few yards distant. He is close by, but the fog hides him. Is it not often so with that Friend who loveth at all times? How we search for Him in the darkness, calling on Him as one that is afar off, sighing for Him as one that is altogether absent. And yet He is so close that He can touch us with His hand, so present that not a sound, not even a sigh, escapes Him. We would actually see Him, look into His face, realise how close He is to us, if it were not for the fog of unbelief which hides Him. Oh! tender Friend, so strong and true, He does not really leave us. Would He but clear away the fog, and let us see Him, how glad we should be! But ought we not to rejoice because He is so near, though we cannot absolutely gaze at Him?

What magnificent days sometimes follow foggy mornings! No mists, no clouds, no cold, no dampness, but bright blue skies, and warmth, and beauty, and glad song. So it is with this cloudy morning, which we call life. A little patience, a little putting up with discomfort and darkness, and THEN the eternal shining, the unclouded brightness of a midsummer's day, with no night to follow, *Then* we shall see, then we shall rejoice and understand. But till then, what can we do but trust, even amid the fogs?

Over Dead Leaves.

IT is not cheerful walking over dead leaves, as any one may prove for himself who will spend a day in the fields or woods at the present time. The country is always beautiful, and it is so now while the skies are still blue and the sunlight falls upon the landscape, and there are yet a few birds left to sit upon the bare hedges and chirp as musically as they may. But we cannot walk over the dead leaves which lie by thousands upon the meadow-paths without feeling that

"The melancholy days have come, the saddest of the year."

They are even sadder than the days of winter, because when they are here we know that brighter ones will follow. And how different are they from the merry spring days and from those of the glad wealthy summer time! Then the trees are putting forth their tender green leaves whose beauty thrills us with the old love and a new pleasure; then myriads of leaves spread protectingly over our heads, shielding us from the blaze of the sun, and only allowing him to drop his brightness here and there at our feet; then we listen to the loving whispers among the branches with a passion of responsive gladness, and sing our thanks to God to their harmonious accompaniment; but now the wind sighs among the bare branches, we walk over dead leaves, treading them deeper into the earth with every footstep.

Still the autumn is so beautiful in itself that its sadness must chiefly come from its associations. We should not so much mind the fading away of the flowers if that did not so forcibly and persistently remind us of another and far sadder autumn. We could not bear to watch the showers of dead leaves if every one of them did not present to us the surface on which is written "We all do fade as a leaf." The short grass would be rather a pleasant sight than otherwise, but that it holds up to our view the solemn words, "As for man his days are as grass; as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more for ever."

But the saddest part of the autumn is, after all, not that which reminds us of our own mortality. Those who are believers in Jesus cannot feel very mournfully about anything which reminds them that they are nearing the time when "this mortal shall put on immortality." "He that believeth on the Son of God *hath everlasting life*," and autumn, with all its fadings, can have nothing to do with that.

November is sombre, because it reminds us of other dead leaves than those which fall from the trees. When it is autumn with us we look back and remember how different it used to be with us. What hopes we had when our year of life was young. We felt and looked like many-leafed June rather than barren November. But where are they now? What can have become of our wealth of onlooking? our glowing expectations? We must look for them now upon the wet ground, where they are half-buried from our sight.

Well, even that need not make us melancholy. Supposing we have spent or lost the few treasures that were given or lent to us, we are on our way to claim "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." It does not matter much what becomes of our few trinkets while the family jewels are waiting for us; and we must needs think very little of the faded leaves we wreathed into a coronet when the crown of life is ready for our heads. So let us go over our dead leaves with firm and cheerful marching-steps. As they remind us of our losses we can merrily sing, "As for you, ye thought evil against

me, but God meant it unto good." And so let us pass on to that wonderful land where there shall be no winter and no fading-time.

Perhaps that which saddens us the most of all is the fact that we become so lonely as the years pass on. We had our friends before, we remember how with them we did not even mind walking over dead leaves; they had such cheery voices, and no bitter winds could make the summer of love die out of their eyes. But they are gone. Well, we surely are not so unloving and selfish as to wish them to be down here treading upon dead leaves when they are living in the perpetual gladness of heaven, and "stand before the throne of God, and do serve Him day and night in His temple."

There is another kind of decay even more sorrowful than this. It is the fading away of the spiritual life. Little it matters, though the winter be all around us, if we can keep summer in our hearts. But when it is winter there—when nothing but mist and fog and deadness characterise what by courtesy is called our Christianity—what shall we do then? It is a fearful thing when the only life that could last for ever seems to be dying, when the cold is creeping into our very souls. But even in this sad case, the saddest of all, we are not left without hope. We may return unto Him who is our Life. He has not given us up, for all our fading. He is inviting us back to the safe, warm shelter that we have left. He can give us immortality still. He does not tire of us, though we have so ill requited all His care and tending. Oh, clinging to that hope, let us return to our God, who will abundantly pardon!

> "O soul, O soul, rejoice!
> Thou art God's child, indeed, for all thy sinning—
> A trembling child, *but His*, and worth the winning
> With gentle eyes and voice."

The First Snow.

THE first fall of snow is probably watched with very different feelings by one half the world from those which, on the same occasion, are felt by the other half. Seen from the well-curtained windows of a warm and comfortable room, the snow is a beautiful sight, suggestive of many thoughts by no means unpleasing. The mind has leisure for reflection, which is shadowed by no shrinking remembrance of a duty calling for more active acquaintance with the snow, not only as it comes down, in silent, soft flakes, but as it lies and melts, being trodden under foot of man in the slushy streets.

The first snow is a pleasant thing to those who can spend the day in perusal of a favourite book by the fireside, or in accomplishing some delicate intricacies in wool-work. Occasional glances at the white shower, relieved by longer ones at the glowing coals between bright bars, are almost certain to introduce images of purity and beauty into the wandering, indolent thoughts, which are made all the better by them.

"In flakes of a feathery white
'Tis falling so gently and slow;
Oh, pleasant to me is the sight
When silently falleth the snow.
How spotless it is, and how pure!
I would that my spirit were so;
Then long as the soul shall endure
More brightly I'd shine than the snow."

The first snow, too, will remind all who have leisure to think at all of those beautiful, pathetic lines, wrung from a heart that was breaking:—

"Oh, the snow, the beautiful snow,
Filling the sky and earth below,
Over the housetops, over the street,
Over the heads of the people you meet.
Dancing, flirting, skimming along,
Beautiful snow, it can do no wrong;
Flying to kiss a fair lady's cheek,
Clinging to lips in frolicsome freak;
Beautiful snow from heaven above,
Pure as an angel, gentle as love."

Also there will come recollections of words even more beautiful and familiar still. "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth. He giveth snow like wool; He scattereth the hoar-frost like ashes; He casteth forth His ice like morsels. Who can stand before His cold?" "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Happy are they who, when the first snow falls, are in the position of the virtuous woman described by the king: "She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet."

But, alas! the other half of the world have very little leisure to contemplate the beauties of the snow; they are very much afraid for their households, for in them there is a very great dearth of scarlet, especially scarlet flannel! And the sight of the snow, which the rich contemplate with such philosophic admiration, chills them to the very heart. It may be beautiful when

> "The trees have a burden of white,"

and there are wonderful crystals upon the house-tops; but their most intimate acquaintance with it is when it is

> "Trampled and tracked by thousands of feet,
> Till it blends with the filth of the horrible street."

It is with a feeling of great desolation that the poor see the first fall of snow. It is very cold when the sharp frosts set in, but it is possible to get warm if time may be stolen for a brisk walk through the streets, or if the labour in which they are engaged be of an active kind. But the snow is so different. It penetrates the thin soles of worn-out boots, it goes through thin shawls and threadbare jackets, it sends the cold creeping up through all the limbs, and brings a shivering and chattering that would terribly frighten comfortable people unused to taking chills. It does even worse things, for it brings back dreaded rheumatic pains, and the hard, tearing cough that gives its victim no chance of rest either by day or night. And to these evils there is small alleviation. Warm blankets cannot be had, and the most freezing sight of all is the cheerless, fireless grate in the almost empty rooms.

The first snow will almost surely exert a softening influence upon the hearts of those to whom God has given an abundance of this world's goods. If only before this has had time to wear off, kindly and charitable intentions were changed into prompt action, how much might be done! It is good to subscribe to soup kitchens and children's dinners, good to feed the starving and clothe the naked. It is even better still—in addition, however, and not in place of the former—to search out for ourselves cases of need and supply them. The sight of the first fall of snow could be better borne if accompanied by the sight of a load of coal at the door. The slushy streets would be less unpleasant if their acquaintance were made with the help of a strong pair of water-tight boots. And the night with its whiteness and silence could be positively enjoyed when contemplated from a snug blanket enclosure.

Let all who admire the snow, and who are not afraid of it, open their hearts to all good influence of compassionate love, and do what they can for their fellows, while for themselves they pray, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Winter Walks.

THAT winter is a joyous season none will deny, for it brings in its train leisure, feasting, mirth, and genial society. That it is beautiful, too, with a sort of cold beauty, is also admitted; for the dazzling snow on the mountains and in the valleys, and the mystic frost-pictures hung up for admiration on every morning are convincing proofs of that. But that the winter is a good time for open-air enjoyment is an assertion with which few persons, perhaps, will agree. It is a pleasant season, says General Opinion, for has it not a Christmas gift in its hands? But it is a time for home comforts, for bright rooms and blazing fires, for merry circles of young faces around the table, and groups of tender friends by the hearth. It is a time

of music and songs, and books and conversations, a time of closed shutters and drawn curtains, not a time for walks along the lanes or rambles in the woods.

And surely to quiet, home-loving English hearts the winter *is* dear because of its fireside enjoyments. But we cannot help thinking that there may be a little too much remaining within the house during the winter. The season is evidently intended to be one of bracing, strengthening, health-giving influences. We, however, make it a very enervating time, by sitting before the fire, and yielding to the soft seductions of our "companionable friends." Often a thermometer would prove the atmosphere of our rooms to be above summer heat, but we still remain in them, yielding to the drowsiness and languor that creep over us, until we have little spirit left to face the wintry blast outside. And yet, in the summer time, we desire above all things to get away from the heat, and to be roused from the inertness which it brings, and so we leave the crowded abodes of man, and go forth to the sea shore, or the mountains, where more invigorating breezes can reach us.

But if it be so necessary then, we cannot but think it is at least a little necessary now that the bracing process should be adopted. If fresh cold air is so essential as it is to vigour of body and mind, what a pity to waste it now that it is so plentiful. Why not, once or twice a day at least, tear ourselves away from the fire and shake off the indolence it engenders, and go away to the moors or the hills in search of pleasure and health? There is something exceedingly invigorating in a winter's walk. Of course no one will loiter when the ground is white, and the air tastes like ice, and the rapid movement is in itself a positive good. It is just the kind of exercise of which we cannot well have too much. And the glow that diffuses itself to the very finger tips is not only enjoyable, but beneficial. It is wonderful, too, what a salutary influence is exerted on the mind through the body. We sit by the fire and dream; but we do not dream, we plan, as we tread with elastic steps over the clods of the field or the frozen meadow-grass. We sit by the fire and lament, but we walk in the roads and hope. Life takes quite a different tinge as we contemplate it from the top of the

hill from that which it wears as seen through a parlour window.

There is beauty in the winter, which it is also a pity to lose. We do not now refer to it as exhibited in the brilliant shops or on the illuminated pavement, but as seen by every eye that looks for it abroad in the winter landscape. It is different from that of the genial spring or the verdant summer, but it is no less real. The hedges, bare as they look, have many a wonder still concealed at their roots; and occasionally we come upon a blaze of brightness as the Christmas berries flash upon our view. The trees are, we think, never more beautiful than now when they stand out so clearly against the grey sky. We cannot half see a tree when it is hidden by its rich drapery of foliage. This is the time to admire the symmetry of the giants, and their graceful branches. This is the time to learn what trees really are, to compare or contrast the different species, and make wonderful discoveries respecting them. Look at the oaks, how grand and noble they are, the very personification of strength and majesty. See the birches, with their silvery stems, and drooping, feathery branches, and say if you have ever seen anything more graceful. But if bare beauty is not to your taste, there are still the pines and the yews, the holly and the ivy. Even wild flowers are not altogether absent. In January, severe as it is, primroses and violets may be found in sheltered parts of our English woods.

And even now there is a bright greenness in the grass, and a rich colouring upon the few leaves that are left, which quite suffice to redeem the winter landscape from any accusation of unloveliness.

It is true that the song of the birds is almost entirely hushed, but the winter is not silent. There is marvellous music in the forests now, which has power to move the responsive soul with awe and admiration.

There is a different and a grander sound, too, in the water as heard now, whether it be the mighty voice of the waves of the sea, or the more insignificant monotone of the river, or the splashing and dashing of the waterfall. Everywhere Nature is practising her Christmas carols, and singing glory to God in the highest.

So let us walk ourselves, and remember to send the

children out too, unless, indeed, they are not strong enough to bear the biting blast. Let all healthy boys go out into the cold that they may become sturdy and brave men. And let us all with gladness of heart thank God for the winter with its pure air and happy associations.

The Country in Winter.

It is generally understood that village life in winter is a thing to be deprecated and shunned. It is supposed to be a state of existence which is nearly akin to that led by the dormouse; and this is a supposition which has some foundation, as would appear to any person who should walk through a small village between the hours of nine and ten in the evening. The houses which here and there are seen dimly in the darkness are not illuminated by so much as a rush-light, and the silence is so profound that it is evidently the dead of the night with the inhabitants, who are in their winter sleep. Wise people they are too, for where gas is not, and tall ghostly trees stretch out naked arms, and the mighty master frost has locked up fields and ponds, what is the good of remaining awake to gaze on nothingness?

And yet, those who spend the winter in the midst of noisy cities do not know what pleasant dreams they have who are hidden away in the country through the winter. Nor is the time spent altogether in dreaming, there is a little doing also. The churches and chapels decorated with the Christmas greenery are the meeting places of the villagers for many purposes, but most of all for the worship of God, and so the winter is their time for religious revivals. They have to make hay while the sun shines, but when for days and weeks the sun does not shine they have leisure and inclination too to turn their thoughts to higher and better things, and to learn more than they knew of the Sun of Righteousness, who can bring a summer gladness into the dearth and coldness of their winter. The

winter is the harvest time of the village philanthropists. They are as busy as they can be with lectures, and night-schools, and special sermons, and mutual improvement classes, and last, though not by any means least, tea-meetings. Indeed, with regard to the latter it may be said that if the people believe in modern miracles at all it is in the tea-meeting miracle. "Get the friends together to a good cake tea, and then we can do anything with them." So that the villagers can be easily stirred up to excitement and pleasure by simple and lawful means. But setting these aside, which may be looked upon as social recreation, there is not doubt that much is made of the winter intellectually in the villages. Of course most persons believe that if the curiosity-monger should be searching for the grossest ignorance that is to be found he should be directed into the country.

But those who know best are able to assert that village people are not far behind others in their quickness of perception, their love of reading, their sound judgment, and their appreciation of the beautiful. And this last characteristic is as evident in the winter as in the summer. You think there is nothing to see in the winter but ice and snow and barrenness. Oh, mistaken man, if you would put yourself under the guidance of a villager on some clear January morning how soon you would be taught better! It is true that the trees are bare, but that is rather an advantage than otherwise, as you will be able to see their beautiful forms and admire their symmetrical proportions.

Altogether people might do worse than spend the winter in the country, especially if they care less for human society than for the works of God and proof that "He hath made everything beautiful in its season."

Merry Christmas.

It is no use trying to wear a sad face at Christmas time. The joy is contagious, and he who would have none of it must shut himself away from the rest of the world, and

close the shutters and draw the curtains. For once all strife, and bitterness, and envy are forgotten, and peace and goodwill visit the earth, and instead of noisy discussions and bickerings, voices are only heard in merry laughter, and wishing everybody a merry Christmas. At least that is how it ought to be, and would be, if people did their duty at Christmas time.

There is so much to make us good-humoured and kindly. Generally it is easy enough to be good when everything is made right and pleasant for us. And when is this the case if not during the Christmas holidays? It is the time when dear friends meet, and families are reunited, and happy conversations are held, and hearts grow warm and tender. It is the time when offences are forgiven, and feuds forgotten, and hands long severed are pressed heartily again. It is the time when people try to feel and speak and act their best, when they forget themselves as much as possible, and think only how genial and helpful they can be to others. It is the time when, to Christian people, the old joy comes with a new force, and they hold sweet fellowship with Him of whom it is said that "He came into the world to save sinners."

Christmas is emphatically the children's holiday. What a merry time the little ones will have, while fathers and mothers, and grandfathers and grandmothers, and aunts and uncles are all trying with one accord to make them happy. It is such capital fun to them to see old Seventy-year-old behaving like young Seven-year-old, and everybody, even the staid persons of the household, touched by the magic wand of Christmas, straightway transformed into children. And their delight—the overflowing exuberance of the child-spirit—does somehow, combined with carols, and bells, and holly and mistletoe, succeed in making us all not only act but feel younger, and that, as everybody knows, is a great thing gained.

Christmas, too, is *the* holiday of the poor. Who could possibly enjoy his own dinner unless he had the consciousness of having provided somebody else with one? If it were only possible to keep want away from all doors, what a festival we would hold. But if we cannot do everything, let us do what we can. Let some who are old and feeble, and near the end of their journey, be made merry

for one day. Let those who are sick and sorrowful receive some help and comfort; and those who find life almost harder than they can bear, be refreshed by the sound of a brother's cheering voice, or the touch of a sister's helping hand.

But even when all is done that can be, and the land does seem full of merriment and laughter, we know that there are many who cannot be otherwise than sad at Christmas time. There are some who would be thankful to shut out the sight of all the glitter, and the sound of all the music, some who would be glad to fall asleep on Christmas-eve, and not wake again until all the merry-making is over. For there is no joy for them, their eyes are full of tears, their hearts are aching with the sense of their great loss, and their homes are empty and desolate. They see nothing but vacant places; they miss the eyes that looked at them so lovingly in years gone by; they cry out for the dear ones who nestled near to them, and gave to Christmas all its joy. How is it that our loss seems the very keenest at this merry time? Well, "Let us go and tell Jesus."

There is no Comforter like Him; and He will come, if He is asked, to the very darkest and saddest places, and take away the grief, and give a strangely sacred joy instead. Oh, whatever we may have of gladness or sorrow, let us make room for Jesus.

A little while and we shall keep our Christmases in our Father's house. We may well be patient when we think of what is awaiting us there.

"And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads; and there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and ever." Will there not be glad Christmases in that land?

Christmas Joy-Bells.

RING the Christmas joy-bells,
Ring them far and wide,
Wheresoe'er is known and loved
Happy Christmastide;
Let the music floating
Over land and sea,
Tell the story of Christ's love,
And a heaven to be.

Ring the Christmas joy-bells,
Let them be so loud
That they shall be heard and loved
By the busy crowd,
Till the heart in leisure
Lays its work aside,
And the hands and head have rest
For this Christmastide.

Ring the Christmas joy-bells,
Let them be so sweet,
That soft thoughts steal over us
Even in the street,
And our eyes look upward
To the throne on high,
Where He reigns in triumph,
Who once came to die.

Ring the Christmas joy-bells,
Let them be so strong,
That all catch the harmony,
And unite in song,
Till our homes are happy,
And our hearts are glad
With the love of Christ who came
To the poor and sad.

Ring the Christmas joy-bells,
Christ the Lord came down
To the lowly manger,
And the thorny crown;
But to-day in Heaven
Praiseful music swells,
Let us join their anthem,
Ring the Christmas bells.

The Last Days of 1870.

THERE is a kind of pathos about the last of anything. Nevermore is a very mournful word, even although it be only applied to an old year; and we know that the days of 1870, which are nearly all gone, will never, never, return again to us!

For many reasons it is obviously a good thing that they cannot. Few people would choose to live any considerable part of their lives over again, and this year has been so disastrous, so saddened by war and accident, that we cannot but feel that if there be any hope of its successor being better, it is well to let it go without any regrets. And yet is there is no doubt but that what has affected nations so seriously for evil has influenced many individuals for good. The year has not been all bad. To some it has brought such new happiness, such great and unexpected joy, that it will long be remembered with gratitude, although to others it has certainly been full of sadness and disappointment.

We cannot help looking back a little at the end of the year. And while we are sure not to forget our sorrows, let us be as careful to recal our mercies. They have been not few nor far between. Every morning we have looked for them, and have found them lying like manna around our tents. Common mercies have been as plentiful as common moments. And uncommon times have been remarkable for special blessings. We look back upon deliverances which God has wrought, preservations when

dangers have been imminent, strength when we were overcome with weakness, help when we thought no help was nigh ; and thinking of the loving-kindness which has been so great toward us, we can but say, " Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

But while we raise our Ebenezers, we also "remember our faults this day." God has not failed in any of His promises; but we have not kept ours. We have broken covenants, unredeemed pledges, a general sense of failure, and a particular recollection of special delinquencies to mar our retrospect of the year. We are full of regrets, indeed, as we look back upon our own work, our own attempts at excellence. It is very mournful that year after year, when the Christmas joy is over, we have to hang our harps upon the willows and mourn.

And yet there is a comfort for us even in this. We can count upon the forbearing love of God, and know that if we go to Him confessing our sins and shortcomings, He will receive us graciously, and love us freely, and pardon us abundantly.

So, although we are full of sorrow and sadness as we think of ourselves, we can be brightened and raised as we think of our God, and lay aside our burden of woe because of His mercy.

There is one thought that ought to comfort us; we are a year nearer to our heavenly home, where sin and trouble will be quite things of the past. It *is* a dreary journey, whatever we may try to persuade ourselves; and that we have so much less of it to pass over should be a source of joy. A little further, and we shall see the golden city gleaming before us, and feel with a sweet sense of rest and peace that our pilgrimage is over. God guide us safely through the years until the last shall bring us there!

The Dying Year.

THE year is dying? Let it die!
It has not brought so much of good
That we would hold it constantly
In grateful, or in loving mood.

The wild winds wail for it outside;
So let them carry it away;
The snow is falling; let it hide
The old year from the sight of day.

Why should we mourn it as a friend?
It wore the stern face of a foe;
The weary hearts that watch its end,
Its hands have overwhelmed with woe.

The year is dying? Let it die!
Great evil and small good it gave;
And hosts who met it trustingly
Have gone before it to the grave.

And yet the year is not to blame
For evil that bad men have wrought,
Theirs was the sin, be theirs the shame,
For fair scenes into ruin brought.

The year was but a servant given
For guidance and for sacred use,
For love of God, and hope of heaven,
And they have clothed it with abuse!

So let it die, the sad old year,
And let the new one take its place;
We yield to it the parting tear,
And ask for it God's pardoning grace,

And take the young year by its hand,
God make it better than the last,
A glad new-comer to each land,
An old friend when its days are past.

What is the Use of Holidays?

THIS may appear a very strange question to ask. But still there *are* people who do ask that very impertinent question, "What is the good of holidays?" And they ask it with a very marked and special reference to those of the Christ-

mas and New Year. There may be, they admit, though somewhat ungraciously, a little sense in taking a holiday in the summer, when it is possible to walk by the sea-side, or breathe the mountain air, and in solitude and rest get real recreation. But winter holidays, say these grumblers, are not holidays at all. The fact is, you work twice as hard as usual in them; and not only so, but by indulgence in late hours and unsuitable meats and drinks, you bring your bodies into a state which is unable to resist or endure fatigue. Holidays, indeed! How do you feel at two or three in the morning, after spending six or eight hours in a crowded room? Is there any weariness to equal it? Did a day's work ever tire you like a day's holiday-keeping at Christmas-time?

Well, perhaps not. But we certainly do not mind it as much. It is better to get tired now and then at pleasure-taking than at work. At least, this kind of weariness has for many thousands of people the charm of novelty. And excitement and gaiety, although they do leave headaches and sometimes even heartaches behind them, are, upon the whole, and taken sparingly, not bad things. And if we are asked what is the use of Christmas holidays, we have no difficulty in finding an answer. They bring relaxation. For a good part of the year we are engaged in earning money; but at the Christmas holidays we do nothing but spend it, and that is a thorough change. We are so busy generally that we dare not sit long at table, or lie late in bed, or spend precious morning light in reading entertaining literature. A hasty glimpse at the war telegrams after breakfast, and a skim over the pages of the general news of the paper have to suffice. But in the Christmas holidays we can spend whole hours in reading the tales of the Christmas numbers of the various periodicals without so much as a whispered remonstrance from conscience. And, what is even better still, we can, for a few days, at all events, *live* romance. What love-making takes place in these holidays! How the young folk love them —and each other!

There are blissful meetings after cruel absences—meetings that are full of poetry of the very highest order. There is so much to be said, so much more to be looked, and most of all to be felt. The course of true love which

has got crooked has to be made smooth again, and of course there must be delicious reconciliations after imaginary estrangements. Besides these things, so much has to be settled for the future that the holidays are scarcely long enough for all that has to be done in them. What is the good of Christmas holidays, indeed! If a census could be taken of all the marriages which result from the fortnight or month commencing, let us say, on December 23rd, there would be a very obvious answer to such a question.

But, besides being the harvest of the young, the Christmas holidays have many uses. In this hard, money-getting age—this age of tremendous work of heart and hands and brain, when life is such a rapid, railroad thing, and the strain and pressure upon individuals is so great—if it were not for a few holidays, what would become of us? A little rest, or even a change of labour, may save us from breaking down altogether. And then it is a good thing to have leisure and opportunities for the amenities of life, good for old friends to meet again, and talk over bygone days and mutual acquaintances, good to revive pleasant memories, good especially to think and talk and sing of a happier time to come—a more complete reunion in "our Father's house," when we shall have entered into "the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

Holidays are of great use, particularly Christmas holidays.

But no doubt they might be better still. There need not be quite so much extravagance. It is surely not absolutely necessary to keep such late hours! Some kinds of amusement, too, might be avoided. There should be no excess of any kind, unless, indeed, an excess of charity be excepted. More might be given away, and less kept to ourselves.

Above all, let Christians remember the apostle's injunction, "*Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*" And then the Christmas holidays will be really useful and good.

A Happy New Year.

We scatter our New Year's wishes very indiscriminately, though, let us hope, not too indiscriminately to be sincere. And, without having received any prophetic inspiration, we are pretty well able to guess who among our friends will have a happy new year, and who will not.

Not that we pretend to tell in the least what the coming months will bring, whether they will be bright or sorrowful, glad or sad. The future is hidden from everybody, and keenness of vision cannot penetrate into it. But we feel instinctively, as we look in people's faces and hold their hands, that whatever comes, some are certain to be happy and some are certain not to be.

For the fact is that circumstances have less to do with happiness than we are apt to imagine. When we wish our friends a happy new year, we mean that we want them to have pleasure and prosperity, and health and honour, all the gains and none of the losses of life. But we must know, if we have lived long and thought much about it, that happiness really does not depend upon such things. It comes from an inward rather than an outward source. Cannot you remember, as you look back, that the years during which you have suffered most have really not been the most unhappy ones? And the years in which you have been spared much sorrow have been the years of least worth to you? So that the happiness of this year will depend not so much upon what comes to us as upon what we are in ourselves.

It seems almost a mockery even to wish some people a happy new year, because one feels so sure that they will not get it. They may have prosperity; even a fortune may be left to them, but they will be sour and miserable still. They will go on to envy and backbite their neighbours, ay, and their friends too for the matter of that; they will judge harshly, and speak maliciously, and foster within themselves all hatred and uncharitableness, and then grumble and repine because they are not as happy as other people. Have they ever read such words as these, "With the measure ye mete it shall be measured unto

you again?" If they have, they surely know—none better—how very true they are, for they who sow discord in the paths of others never walk over roses themselves.

They do not know—they will not know—any of that hidden peace which makes other faces so beautiful. For there are others to whom we express the same wish with a full consciousness that they will have a happy new year. And yet their way may seem to be a much sadder one. There may be losses and trials and afflictions for them. But they know where to find a joy that nothing can take away, a peace that no wild winds can disturb. They sing such songs as these—

> "I stand upon the mount of God,
> With sunlight in my soul;
> I hear the storms in vales beneath,
> I hear the thunders roll.
> But I am calm with Thee, my God,
> Beneath the glorious skies,
> And to the height on which I stand
> Nor storms nor clouds can rise."

There is an interesting fable abroad that the young are sure to be happy. But it is possible to wish even them "A happy new year," with a very grave presentiment that they will not get it. Youth does not necessarily mean happiness, any more than age means sorrow. And there are some bright young faces round about us that will not look bright on every day of the year. For one thing, they think too much of being happy, and chase pleasure too eagerly. Happiness does not always come with pleasure, and it never stays long where frivolity has its abiding place.

What can we do to be happy? If we are tired of the old ways, and are really longing for something better, is there a road to happiness even for us? "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." "Trust in the Lord, and do good." "Happy is that people who is in such a case, yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

Tired.

THE work and worry of every day make us sigh for the darkness, and stillness, and repose of night. How often with aching head, and weary limbs, and over-wrought spirit, do we welcome the evening as the greatest blessing!

But we need to be weary to find out the exquisite enjoyment of repose. Is there anything like the calm, thankful gladness with which we close the door on the outer world of work, where we have found it so hard to be patient, and gentle, and forbearing, and feel that we have eight or nine hours before us, and nothing to do? How many of us have felt Montgomery's words,—

> "Night is the time for rest;
> How sweet when labours close,
> To gather round an aching breast
> The curtain of repose;
> Stretch the tired limbs and lay the head
> Upon our own delightful bed."

How many of us thank God for night! Even sorrow is forgotten for a time! the anxiety which has crushed us leaves us long enough for us to find new strength, to gather up our burden again when the hour shall come. The darkness and silence are like curtains which shut out all perturbing influences, so that we can for once have privacy, and hold quiet communion with our own hearts and God. And after that how peaceful is the night! How calmly we close our eyes and fall asleep!

It is not strange that when we feel the blessing of rest and sleep, we should yet look with a sort of terror on the last long slumber! What is it to frighten us? We shall grow over-tired, and faint, and quiet, and the shadows will creep towards us, and the night will set in, the things of the world will grow very dim and indistinct; and our heavy eyes will close, and some one standing by will say, "He giveth His beloved sleep."

And then we shall be at rest. We have our dreams of golden crowns and waving palms; of sapphire walls, and seas of glass; but is any thought of that home so sweet as that which assures us that there we shall never grow tired

again? There we shall have continuous, satisfying, unbroken rest.

Does it matter so very much that the hills are steep and our feet grow weary? This is only for a little while. Soon we shall begin a shorter journey, and hear our Father say, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." And then we shall go home and find our morning of joy and live without weariness for ever.

Working in Vain.

We soon get past the age at which it amuses us to build castles and fortresses of sand for the pleasure of seeing how rapidly and easily the next wave washes them away. In that happy time when the only result for which we labour is a little more fun, we are very easily satisfied. We have no objection whatever to spend a whole day in the preparation of something which shall provide us with some interesting object for half an hour in the evening; and even blowing bubbles which do little but burst, affords us delight.

Afterwards we get a great deal more consequential. We want to see satisfactory results after our efforts, recompense for toil, profit for outlay, reward for labour. Success is dear to every heart. We have no objection to concentrate all our thoughts and energies on one thing, to "strain every nerve," to work from early morning till late night, if only we may gain our object thereby. Energy, anxiety, labour, strength, all are nothing, so that we may but succeed in the end. We do not care so very much about the steepness or the ruggedness of the hill, so that we may at last gain the very top. We do not regret patience and forethought and devotion, so that something tangible and worthy be gained by it all.

Is there not something presumptuous in all this, especially when it is felt with regard to work which is done professedly in the Master's service? No sooner do we say a word or two for Him after the thousands which we have spoken for ourselves; no sooner do we try to teach

the young, or leave a tract at a door, or in His name visit the sick, than we begin to use as our right the very common prayer—"Let us not labour in vain, nor spend our strength for nought." As if our labour and strength were such precious and important things that they might not be wasted! As if our words were so golden as to deserve to be preserved! As if we were so wise that we might never be set at nought! Oh, vain and impatient that we are! Is it not honour enough for us if God let us serve in His vineyard? Is it not distinction enough for us if we may speak our foolish words and give our little efforts recognised by Him? What matters it though we do labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought? Surely there is reward enough in the service itself, though all results be withheld. It is better to be like little children who are content to do something at the bidding of the mother whom they love, even though the work itself be worthless.

But, after all, we never do work in vain. There is joy in labour. It makes us blithe, and strong, and gladsome. It makes life worth something. It satisfies the craving within us. And if it do nothing more than make us active and comparatively content with our lot, we have reason to be glad that God has given us work to do. Let us not be over anxious for success; let us not crave for high and distinguished things to do. Who of us lives in vain? Surely there are some eyes that brighten at our approach; surely there is one heart that grows lighter because of our love. Let us no longer sigh about living in vain, but rather rejoice and be thankful that so much honour is given to us.

Not in Vain.

I HAVE not laboured in vain, though the seed takes long to grow,
If I have sown it all day in a world of pain and woe;
Though not a green leaf springeth to gladden these eyes of mine,
Yet is the grain not lost, it shall thrive in the life divine.

I have not laboured in vain, though many a weary night
I have prayed unanswered prayers for a glimmer of heavenly light;
Through waste of many words, and a frequent sigh of pain,
The conviction is strong as death that I shall not have prayed in vain.

I have not laboured in vain, if some little word of mine,
Has made the journey of life the brighter for one to shine;
If I have brought a hope to a spirit that, worn and faint,
Had quite forgotten its song, but echoed its own complaint.

I have not laboured in vain, if I see in the children's eyes
Glances of love and light, and a striving to grow more wise;
If I have but taught them a song with a thought of the Saviour's love,
Though I garner no other fruit, I am owned by the God above.

It is not success or praise that the children of God shall need;
It is but to serve Him here, though feebly and weak indeed;
Is not the joy enough if He will but let us wait
For His sake on the humblest child who shall stand at the golden gate?

Through the Sermon.

THE prayers have been offered, the hymns have been sung, and you have followed the reader through a psalm from the Old Testament and a chapter from the New. It is time for the sermon to begin, and you draw the hassock a little nearer to your feet, find a comfortable place for your elbow, and nestle among the cushions of your pew. It is the evening service, and you have lost a little of the freshness of feeling with which you sang in the morning, "I

was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Still you are not as tired as you might be, the Sunday after-dinner nap having been a very refreshing one. So you look with some interest, or, at the very least, with a momentary excitement of curiosity toward the pulpit. A man comes forward who has something to say to you. He has a message to deliver which he believes he has received from God, He has thought over it, prayed over it, felt over it. It has cost him many hours of positive hard work. But he has it ready now, and rises to deliver it.

The text is announced and read. It is one which you have seen before, and it does not, therefore, possess the charm of novelty. There is nothing particularly striking in the first sentence of the sermon, the preacher being more anxious to lead up to an important conclusion than at once to startle his hearers into sudden and fitful eagerness. As for you, you seldom find introductions interesting, you are accustomed to give one ear to them, and the other to the many inner clamouring voices which make themselves heard even in the silence of God's house. So before the preacher has spoken a couple of dozen sentences your eyes begin to wander. They fall upon your friend Smith, and you remember his words of greeting in the morning, and also that you are engaged to dine with him on Tuesday. Then you look at Jones. You wonder if that report is true of which you have heard several versions. As it is right to be charitable, especially on a Sunday, you hope it is not; but still you would not be very surprised if it were! Mrs. Jones looks careworn, looks indeed as if she were having some wandering thoughts, too; and how fashionably his daughters are dressed!

Cutting through your musings upon Jones and his belongings come a few solemn words. You arouse yourself to a little more attention, and find that the preacher has got through his introduction into the first, second, and thirdly. For five minutes you follow him, and then you find yourself wondering what day of the month it is, and carrying your thoughts forward to the week you begin to reckon up the things that most need attention. You have a bill to meet, or a contract to ratify, or a paper to write, or the spring painting and cleaning to look after, or you

are going for a holiday, and speculate as to what sort of weather there will be.

The preacher's voice is growing more loud and distinct. He looks really very much in earnest, and you feel a sort of pang as you contrast your own thoughts with the words he is saying. You move a little out of the indolent position in which you have been indulging, and which conscience now renders uncomfortable, and look at him. He is telling you that you are making a mistake, that the world to which you give your thoughts and energies—your very life indeed—is not everything. He reminds you that there will come a time when you will be amazed and grieved that with strange infatuation you preferred the little and the fleeting things to those that were great and everlasting. You almost feel that he is right. You ask yourself is it worth while to spend your labour for that which satisfieth not? Your eyes move from the preacher's face to the windows through which the sunset dyes are coming. After all, you think, this world is very beautiful, and its interests press around you so strongly that you cannot get away from them, and would not if you could.

You make a final effort to listen. Your resentment is aroused against the speaker, for he has twice said "Lastly," and now he says, "A few words in conclusion." It is time he had finished, and you look at your watch, and tell yourself that the place is very close and warm, and you will be glad to get out. A rush of things from the outside comes over you again, but with virtuous indignation you banish all and listen to the closing words. So fervent are they, so impassioned, that you almost wish you had listened all the time. The preacher speaks of the Saviour of the world until even your heart is moved. You wish you loved Him better, and thought more of Him, and did fewer things to grieve Him. You really will try, for you would like to have His blessing.

But while you are thinking so, the book is closed, the sermon is over, the rest by the way is finished, and you go away from the sanctuary, and the hymns and the preacher's earnest voice, into the world again.

People say that in our modern days too much importance is attached to the sermon, and undue attention given to it. If it be so, alas for the prayers and the singing!

Letting in the Light.

"I FIND life is altogether a different thing from that which I supposed it to be. It is something more than toiling and moiling from morning till night, without a glimmer of joy, though I used to think it dreary enough before. I have known what it is—though I am only eighteen, and people say that youth is a happy time—to awaken in the morning with a crushing sense of the gloom of all things, and a weary resignation to what I supposed was the inevitable darkness of the day, while the only spark of brightness I had lay in the thought that the night would soon come round again, when at least I might find rest."

"And it is so no longer? what has made the difference?"

"The light has been let into my life. I was invited to join the young women's Bible-class in our Sunday-school. I have found Jesus the Light of the world, and this has quite changed the aspect of things for me. I cannot tell you what a low kind of life I lived before, but this has raised me and given me not only heaven to look forward to, but a life here that is worth living. It is wonderful what this light does for us in the world."

So it is. Do we not all know that? Are we not all helped to live more nobly and strive more earnestly because Christianity has let in the light upon us? Many Sunday-school teachers who take their places on Sunday morning with bright, eager faces have spent weeks of toil and anxiety, which would have been almost unbearable but for the light which the love of Christ has shed upon them. They find that the expressions, "the wilderness and solitary place," are not too strong to describe the world in which they live. They are often enough weary and heavy laden, the burdens of life are heavy for them to carry, and the paths they have to tread are steep and rugged enough. They know what darkness is. They know what it is to labour upon uncongenial work and in uncongenial society, and often they have very weary limbs and aching heads when the night brings its season of rest and repose.

And we think it is well that these things should be. Much is said about all the work being left for those who are already workers to do. "Why do not the rich, who have nothing to do all the week, teach in the Sunday-school, and let those who are busy during the six days rest on the Sabbath?" But God gives His work to those who can best do it. What could the rich say to these young people? What do they know about darkness and hard work, about scanty fare and empty homes? How can they sympathise with those who have to spend a long dreary day earning a shilling? No, we think we have the right class of teachers for the work.

Only let them let in the light by all means in their power. Let them not fail in their duty. They know what is needed; let them give to their children that which will brighten their whole existence. The young people, looking bright enough in their festive Sunday array, have a very dark to-morrow to look forward to. Give them something that shall last longer than the school hour—something that that they can take with them to their work, which will make them strong to resist temptation, diligent in the discharge of their work, something that shall shed a light upon everything.

Can we do this? Have we anything to give that shall have this effect?

God has sent us to them us on purpose. We have sent the Saviour's words to give them; we have to tell them of His love. Oh, friends, let us be in earnest, and pray that we may bring them out of darkness into God's marvellous light.

The Unprayed-for.

NOTWITHSTANDING the multitude of petitions which go upward to the throne of the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, there are yet several large and very important classes of persons for whom supplication is seldom if ever offered. Who ever attended a prayer-meeting without hearing a petition for ministers of the Gospel from each

person who engages in the sacred exercise? But who ever heard so much as a word uttered on behalf of writers? What a start of surprise there would be if some earnest brother uttered such a sentence as "Lord, bless all editors who proclaim Thy truth, make them wise to win souls, let them not labour in vain, and may they find that in watering others their own souls are watered by the dews of grace." Such a prayer is presented daily on behalf of those whose office it is to break the bread of life in the midst of the people. And how necessary it is that in their great and solemn work their hands should be upheld by the prayers of all thoughtful believers cannot be too strongly understood and felt. But why should not writers be encouraged and strengthened in the same way? Is the press much less powerful than the pulpit? Is its influence less strongly felt? We venture to suggest that an earnest and a God-fearing writer to whose words the people will give heed has as much ability and as many opportunities to do good as a preacher. He addresses thousands instead of hundreds, for many who will not listen will read. And where error is combated and the truth upheld, where infidelity and sin are fought against, and the cross of Jesus Christ is uplifted, and His name glorified in tender, reverent words, there the Lord's work is certainly being done. Yet oftentimes it must be that the work is great and the labourer weary, the wrong so mighty and the warrior so feeble; how, then, shall he go forth to the battle unless his brethren wish him God-speed, and make him strong by their prayers?

We hear, and very properly, hundreds of prayers on behalf of Sabbath-school teachers. But who hears a single petition for day-school teachers, heads of schools, and masters of colleges? And yet these, who have so much more influence over children, who have all the week instead of a single day in which to impart their instruction, surely need to be prayed for. Is the exception made because they teach secular knowledge? Many an earnest Christian teaches the Bible every day. Do you know any Sunday-school teacher who is doing a greater or a better work than Dr. Arnold did? Do you know a more arduous occupation than that of a London ragged-school teacher, labouring every day and every evening in the endeavour to

lighten the load of ignorance which already crushes the children?

Other persons who would be none the worse for a few prayers are doctors. What important persons they are to us at some portions of our lives, when we hang upon their words and eagerly listen for what we yet dread to hear. What different "sick beds" there would be, if those who have to give that ominous shake of the head, and almost sign the death-warrant, were Christian men, who knew how to point the sufferer to the Healer of the nations. And effectual, fervent prayer may, nay, will, avail much on their behalf.

In this matter of the unprayed-for, it may be said to us, "This ought ye to have done, and not have left the other undone."

There are many people in the world who are prevented by weakness, or press of other claims, from engaging in any department of active labour for Christ. They cannot teach in the Sunday-school, or distribute Bibles and tracts, or visit the sick. But there is one thing they can do—they can pray. Let them do this. Let them every day spend a few minutes in earnestly asking God's blessing on those who are, for the most part, unprayed for, and they do not know the good which they may do.

Evening.

WHAT tender memories gather around our evenings! They are our happiest times, and we crowd them with sweet thoughts or loving communings of true hearts. They are times when the hard-earned rest comes to us, laying cool fingers upon aching heads, and bidding the weary limbs be free. All the day long we must toil: our duties stand in the way, and with clamorous voices keep our feet from strolling into the fair meadow-land that lies outside of the busy work-places. But when the evening comes let us rest, let us taste the luxury of idleness for a little time, and be content to let our hands and heads and feet do nothing.

Everybody should have rest in the evening. Work is an ennobling, strengthening, healthy thing, but he who begins it as soon as he rises in the morning, and keeps at it until he goes to bed at night, has too much of it. We need not only sleep for our bodies and minds, but we need recreation too, and we must set aside some time for the cultivation of those kindly affections which, as much as anything else, make life worth having.

Is it not the evening of the day, with all its sweet associations, that makes our English homes so dear to us? When we are away from them, do we think so often of the family pursuing their different avocations, as of that time when, the evening meal taken, all are at home, and the book is read, or the pleasant conversation held, or the sweet household music is enjoyed?

It seems too as if Jesus has made the evening sacred for us: "And when He had sent the multitude away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone." "And at even when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased." "They constrained Him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them." "And the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you."

It is not so still? He is with us all the day long, but at eveningtide we recognise Him, and feel how near He is, and know that He talks to, and we with Him. And how often do our hearts burn within us as we tread the silent roadways or sit musing while the stars come out and look upon our joy. And this being the case, it is little wonder that we love the evening so well.

How beautiful are our evening hymns! That one now so popular—

"Sweet Saviour, bless us ere we go,"

we are never weary of singing. Then there is the old favourite—

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night,"

and that other soothing and comforting one—

"Saviour, breathe an evening blessing,"

also that peerless hymn, so dear to all who have read it—

"Abide with me, fast falls the eventide."

Who can sing them without feeling once more how wonderful is the love of Jesus, that can fill the closing day with such peace and joy?

It ought to comfort us too in looking forward to that other evening whose shadows are already beginning to fall upon our path.

It is only the evening, and the evening is always a blessed time. Let us not fear but that that will be the most blessed of all. Sweet will be the rest that comes to us weary ones then. Softly the Father's arms will bring us into a safe shelter. So happy, so blessed shall we be that only two things will need to be said: "So He giveth His beloved sleep;" "Until the day dawn and the shadows flee away."

The Perplexities of Life.

THERE are times in the lives of all of us when we would give almost all we have to know whether it would be right or wrong to do certain things. And we cannot surely know, although we may take days of thought and nights of anxiety and consideration, until having decided one way or other circumstances unfold themselves and make the matter plain. Life is often most aptly compared to a journey in which there are ups and downs, pleasant meadows, and barren rocks, flowery ways, and rugged mountains. And the comparison is always good. Life is a journey, and we pilgrims have to take it whether we will or not, and although one sure result is that it will cause us often to be very tired and worn out. But one of the most trying things connected with the journey is that we so often come to cross-roads, and find no finger-post to direct us. "Which is the way?" Anxiously we look along first one and then the other, but no familiar marks

meet our eyes. The roads are all strange, and we know not which to take; we have never been that way before, and cannot tell what lies hidden in the misty distance. Our perplexity would not be so great if life were merely a holiday, and a mistake in the roads did not matter. It matters very much that we choose only the right ways. It is not easy to retrace our steps; and sometimes it is impossible. We cannot go back and start again. The time, and strength, and opportunity that we had at the beginning are spent now. We must keep on where we are, however much we may regret the choice we made.

It is remembering this that fills us with anxiety when the time comes for fresh changes to be made. We are so afraid of making mistakes that we would almost rather keep in the old, well-trodden way than branch off into untried scenes, though it may be that great benefit would follow. Who has not known hesitation when a new kind of occupation, a new sphere of labour, a new mode of life is suggested? Who does not know the feeling of timidity with which a strange place is approached? It may be that all sorts of blessings and treasures await us there; but then we cannot be sure. It is also possible that danger, pain, and sorrow are lurking there too. What we want is to know beforehand, to see into the future, though it be only a little way.

In our perplexity we are much given to seeking advice. "Where no counsel is the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." So we gather our counsellors about us, and happy are we if they make the way plain and do not increase our perplexity. Some help it may be they give; some wise things they are able to tell us; but even then we are left to decide for ourselves, and take the step without really knowing whither it shall lead us. Besides, even the best of friends are often compelled to acknowledge that they are not wise enough to guide or direct.

"If I said, Go left or right,
The counsel would be light,
The wisdom poor of all that could enrich thee.
My right would show like left,
My raising would depress thee,
My choice of light would blind thee,
Of way would lead behind thee,
Of end would leave bereft."

And so we are all made to feel in our time of difficulty that very little help can come to us even from our friends.

What would become of us if there were no light to guide us, no wisdom to direct? But happily there is. Long ago the people in their perplexity did the only thing there is for us to do, when they said to the God of all wisdom, "*Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee.*" To-day as then the only hope we can have is in God. He who sees the end from the beginning, who alone knows whither the intricate pathways of life lead, will help us when we have most need of greater foresight than our own. Who has not felt the quiet and repose which come from simply pouring out our perplexities before our Father, and asking His direction?—

"We kneel how weak, we rise how full of power;"

and even if at first we are not able to see any more plainly, yet we feel that our cause is in strong hands, and are content to wait.

But it is also true that we are made to see. The writer of a story says, "She knelt long with uplifted hands by her bedside, . . . but as she prayed the thorny path grew less forbidding, and her certainty that it was the right one the stronger." So it often is with us. Light comes upon the path which it is better for us to take. We see a finger directing us out of the maze. Let us then not hesitate to ask for wisdom to guide us every step of the way. If perplexity be trying, and repose be sweet, why do we not more frequently enjoy the latter? We might if we would. We have only to "commit our way unto the Lord," and He will keep his promise, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."

Medicine.

THERE is a wonderful couplet in a good old-fashioned hymn which is

> "Familiar in our mouths as household words."

This is it:—

> "Since all that I meet must work for my good,
> The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food."

We have to live a great many years before the sound of "medicine" possesses any music for our ears. We have sunny memories of many a by-gone time when there existed a necessity—which, however, we never recognised —for physic. We remember the suspicious-looking spoonful of jam, which did not appear to be quite the right colour, but which we were assured by plausible lips was "so nice." We can recollect the tempting draught which half filled the glass, and which we were informed by competent authority was "rich wine," but which, though pleasing to the eye, was invariably so displeasing to the taste that we refused to be comforted in our disappointment without numerous lumps of sugar. Also we may remember the hard-hearted medical man from whom we hid under tables and behind chairs, who never came to see us without ruining our play prospects, and who told us, in answer to our pitiful entreaty not to make the medicine "too nasty," that "doctors did not sell sugarplums."

"The fashion of this world passeth away," and our children are better off than we were, for the doctors have actually come round (some of them), and do sell sugarplums in the shape of tiny and sweet globules. But notwithstanding even that, it is questionable if the idea of medicine can ever by any means be made a pleasing one, and we cannot help congratulating ourselves that we are not obliged to take it unless we wish.

But are we not? There are other kinds of medicines than tinctures and pills, and they are administered by other hands than those which held the nauseous draught

to our childish lips. We make all sorts of wry faces, and push the cup away as petulantly as ever, but we are forced to drink it, and the only consolation for us is the very old one, that we needed it, and that it will do us good. And no doubt there is as much truth in that to-day as when measles and whooping-cough did their best to extinguish the little spark of life which gave such joy to the dear ones who cared for us.

Though we have passed safely through such crises, we are not by any means perfectly sound and well, and we need our medicine as much as ever. There is many a man who would be all the better for a good dosing. We see him, with his cross face and fretful tone, snapping and snarling at everybody, and we think, "Now, if you were only a child, how much good a powder would do you." And so, no doubt, it would. And he is pretty sure to get it, too.

We must have noticed how fond people generally are of prescribing for one another. If you have a cough, you will get at least fifty recipes, all different, and every one the very best. And if you are troubled with some other complaints, remedies are not only suggested, but administered.

You are smitten with an attack of pride, and you are immediately dosed with disparaging estimates and slighting remarks. You have a fit of ill-temper, and you are obliged to drink (serve you right too) curative draughts of the essence of cold shoulder. You are seized with severe and prolonged attacks of indolence, and you are subjected to the necessary medicine of non-success. You are almost consumed by the fever of impatience and ambition, and with prompt attention all the inhabitants of the world seem to be transformed into armies of doctors and nurses, intent upon curing you with large doses of hindrance and disappointment and waiting.

Well, the physic is very distasteful, but it is really true that we do often need it, and that it does us good. We are not too healthy as it is, but if it were not for this, what should we be like? It will be as well to realise that the medicine has its mission, and accomplishes it. It will make us more patient, and willing to drink it. Best of all is it to remember that, though the cup is held to us by

various hands, it is always mixed by our Father who is the Great Physician. When once we feel that, we shall also find that—

"The bitter *is* sweet, the medicine *is* food."

Our Worlds.

"We live in a world of our own." And very little we know or care of the great world that surges around the inner circle in which we are confined. Grandly enough we talk of large hearts and universal sympathy; but we must admit that after all our world *is* a little narrow. One part of us may be able to go out to the thousands of human beings who are our brothers and sisters, though we know them not; but the best part, the warm affections, the true interest, centre about the chosen few only. And so it should be. If we do live in a little world of our own, who shall say but that it is all the dearer because of its smallness?

But what different worlds they are! One finds his in his business, one in his bank, one in the public affairs, which he imagines could not possibly get on without him; one in his family, one in a narrow portion of society, one in amusement, one in a few friends, and another in one single person. And into this little world no strangers may come, no discordant voice be heard, no cold look scrutinise. For often this world is quite an invisible one to all but ourselves; only we know the deeper depths, only we can understand the wheel within the wheel.

Yet, perhaps, it might be well to inquire whether we do quite wisely in our selection of this exclusiveness. It is, perhaps, well to shut ourselves up in a little world of our own, always provided that it is a *worthy world*, that it can really satisfy us, can meet all the requirements of our higher natures. But, alas! this is not always the case. It is in every sense a narrow world, and it is of the utmost importance that it should be widened and height-

ened, that our sympathies should be expanded, and our love be more generous and less selfish.

We are often great losers by living in little worlds of our own. How many people miss a blessing because they have no sympathy with it. We want the worlds in which we live to be enlarged, so that we can take in all the good things that are around us. We need to be quick to see and feel with others, and to have the power to appreciate the pleasure or the work which makes life so great a thing for them.

It will do us good to come out of our little worlds, and to grow clearer-sighted and larger-hearted, and more genial toward one another. If there be any brightness, any forgiveness, any service by which we can make one heart rejoice, let us not hesitate to render the blessing and perform the good while we may. If Jesus so loved us, ought not we to love one another, and not only those in our world, but the outsiders into whose cup perhaps but little joy may fall?

Our Work.

THOSE who make a point of learning the lessons of the day by reading newspaper accounts of its events, will have seen the sad record of a fatal torpedo explosion at Portsmouth, and must have been moved to sympathy by the following statement.

"One of the witnesses stated that Lieutenant Meade said to him, 'While I am sensible, I wish it to be publicly known that it was nothing connected with my gun that caused this business. It was nothing but the heat from the melted gutta-percha that exploded some of Schultz's wood-powder.'

"He seemed very anxious that that should be publicly known, as he was very much wrapped up in the gun. He also wished him to tell his friends that it did not occur through the gun."

Could anything be more pathetic than this dying man's love of his work? It was a love that had doubtless carried him through many a long day of toil and fatigue, many a night of anxiety and careful thought; a love that was painstaking, persevering, and very determined; a love that was even stronger than death. It seems sad beyond expression that, just as it was completed, when he was within sight of the goal, the life of the energetic worker should pay the cost. We do not read, however, that he—this honourable gentleman in more than the name—lost any of his precious time of consciousness in selfish regret; he expressed great anxiety about the fate of his assistant, and, not knowing that his life too would be forfeited, directed that he and his family should be provided for out of his—Mr. Meade's—private means, and then, jealous for the reputation of what had probably been his life's work, said the words we have repeated respecting his gun.

Is there not a lesson for all of us here? We who have other work to do, who are called to perform other offices, who have greater missions to fill, are we equally anxious and jealous about our work? It is quite a right feeling. The happiness, the ease, even the life of the worker is not as important as his work. We must grow old and feeble, our hands must forget their cunning, our eyes must lose their keenness of vision, our brains must cease to be active, and at last we must die, and be forgotten: but our work, *that* may live, that is not necessarily a decaying thing, that may be great, and productive, and lasting, however small we may be. If we believed this, if we knew our power, if we understood rightly the work which God has given us, and how noble a thing it might be made, should we not be more earnest, more diligent, more conscientious in its performance? Surely the dilatoriness, the carelessness, the lack of interest which we exhibit, is all because we do not know the greatness of our work.

This quite holds good in regard to all the ordinary occupations of life, the daily work which we are obliged to perform in order to live. But it is even more necessary to remember the importance of work when we are reflecting upon that other kind of duty which is imposed upon every one of us, the duty of doing good to our fellows. We can understand it when we think of our teachers. It is right

that those who have our health in their keeping should be very much in earnest, and that those who are called to instruct us with regard to religion and eternal life should also feel how great a work they have to do,—but "*our work?*"

What is it? Is it to live as a son or a daughter, and do our part toward the making of a happy home? Then let us do it as if we knew how much depended upon it, what memories the hearts that are around us shall take down through the years, what principles they shall adopt, what tones and words they shall use when they talk of right and wrong, what life they shall live, what death they shall die, even all this may, in great measure, depend upon the way in which we do our work. If we are fathers and mothers, still more is in our hands, more power, greater importance, a larger amount of responsibility. And if we congratulate ourselves that we have none of these ties, and, therefore, that we have no need to work, we are mistaken. Every Christian has a work to do, whether he does it or not; if we are young, there are plenty whom our love and warm-heartedness may bless; if we are old, there are young feet to lead into the narrow way, young hands to teach, young voices to train. Every one has some work allotted to him, but the only way to do it well is to love it, to throw our hearts into it, to let it be dear as our very lives.

It is because we do not this that our work is ever failing. Of course we blame the materials, the circumstances, anything but ourselves. Oh, if we would be worth anything in the world, if we would be

"Only remembered by what we have done,"

let us pray that we may love our work.

Saints.

It not unfrequently happens that the most solemn and tender relationships of life are turned into ridicule by those whose only province is to look on and criticise.

For instance, no one will deny that that is one of the supreme moments of life when two hearts drawn together as by an invisible power compel two persons to vow that for all years to come they will live for each other. And yet, strangely enough, this is the occasion of more jests than any other subject can produce.

But this being so is almost a proof that we live in an age when ridicule is likely to attack anything that is unusually tender and earnest. And, therefore, it is little wonder that scorn should be heaped upon the name which describes those persons who are eminent for piety and virtue, and that the word "saint," the Bible-name for God's heroes and heroines, should be now seldom, perhaps never, used but as a taunt.

"They have themselves to thank for it," say some. And perhaps that is true. Their very enthusiasm, which has caused them to carry some things, and these non-essentials, too far, may be in part to blame. The austerity of conscientiousness which has made them fearful of going into paths of sin may have made them also fearful of walking in "the green pastures" and laughing valleys which God has Himself provided for them. And their very peculiarity has, as they might have expected, been set down to pride, and even they will scarcely be venturesome enough to say that the allegation is altogether false or undeserved.

But scorn, though it be a very bitter cup indeed, has highly medicinal properties. And as it has been dealt out to the saints in anything but homœopathic doses, there is no doubt at all but that it has been at least partially curative in its effects. The servants of God love their Master so much, and are so keenly sensitive with regard to all that concerns Him, that, if they can help it, they will not twice do or say the thing that has brought contumely upon His name. And those who are the nearest to what He would have them be are not harsh, or cold, or hypocritically straight-laced, but are known for what they are by their gentleness, and humility, and all-absorbing love.

Still, whatever they may be, they cannot escape reproach. They are objects for a thousand watchers, and the eyes bent upon them with an unflagging interest are exceed-

ingly keen and sharp-sighted. He must be a bold man indeed who in the present day dare openly set up for a saint; only that the simple avowal, "I am a Christian," also confesses the only source from which he expects to derive any strength or goodness he may have. For if a Christian do wrong, it is the occasion of great laughter and delight in the house of the enemy. There are wonderful clapping of hands, and shouts of derision, and "Saint, saint!" becomes the cruellest taunt.

Still, they might be able to bear this with equanimity, if not exultation,—for the Master said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you," —if it were not for one thing. It is not the scorn that makes them sad, but the inner consciousness that by their own wrong-doing they have deserved it. They are not what they would be. They are full of failures and imperfections, and they would themselves tell you that they can never be called "saints" but in bitterest irony.

Well, it should comfort them to know that while others gladly take them at their very worst, their Master is exceedingly generous in His appreciation of them, and takes them at their very best. "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest me, and they *have received* them, and have *known surely* that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me . . and *I am glorified in them.*" Were they then perfect men? No, indeed; Jesus had greater faith in them than any one else would have had. They were saints, but one of them denied Him, and "they all forsook Him and fled." But His were not the eyes to see nothing but flaws in them, His were not the lips to condemn them. Love glorifies everything, and changes all things into new beauty, and is it not with inimitable *love* that Jesus looks upon His saints?

Fragments of Humanity.

"Gather the fragments that remain that nothing be lost."

CONSIDERING all things, perhaps we attend to that wise injunction pretty fairly, for we live in an age of shrewdness and acquisitiveness. There are people who find that if they take care of the pence the pounds will take care of themselves. And many have amassed fortunes by the simple means of gathering up the fragments.

It is a good thing when prosperity comes and still the heart does not grow hard, a good thing to learn for one's self the higher blessedness of giving. Much has been said of the gladness of those who have been made happy by the benevolence of others; but it is a question if they have known half as much pleasure as those who provided the good things for them. And in all the world there are few delights to equal that of those who are engaged in the good work of gathering up the fragments of humanity that nothing be lost. There is a great joy for those who spend themselves in the service of others. Their own hearts are made happier than those whom they bless, and a peace steals over them which is not of this world. Besides, they must know that they are doing real work for Christ when they seek and save those who were lost.

Orphans are some of the fragments of humanity. Is it not wise to gather them up that they be not lost? Of course you are not *obliged* to notice them,—you may leave them if you like. Ay, that is just what you will do. You need not mention them in your wills, but you *must leave* them as legacies for your own children. What sort of gifts shall they be? Thieves, blasphemers, idlers, criminals, or workers, teachers, rulers, and geniuses? Will you only accumulate money for your children, or will you put some of it out at interest, by gathering up the fragments? What say you? Which will be the more economical plan? Which will pay the best?

There are other fragments which are being diligently and thriftily gathered up, and which will well repay the trouble bestowed upon them.

Take a column of advertisements from any paper.

"The penny soup kitchen! 750 persons relieved on Saturday last, many of them wretched sufferers waiting in the frost and snow for hours."

"Ireland! Ireland! Ireland! Five millions of people without Christ." "Homeless, friendless, helpless." "Union-walk Ragged-schools." "The paralysed and epileptic." Here are fragments of humanity waiting to be gathered up. Is there no disciple to go down the ranks and collect them together bearing the Master's word? Is there any excuse for us if we go on carelessly thinking of nothing but ourselves and our own comfort?

Let us waste nothing. Are not the bodies and souls of men of more value than bread?

Wishing.

We wish very differently for different things. Some of our wishes are very idle—mere passing thoughts, that are spoken and forgotten; some are very earnest, so eager and intense, that we feel almost as if we *must have* the thing we wish for. Of course there must be a real want before we shall have a real wish; there must be a heart-hunger before feverish desire.

"I wish I were useful," is a good wish; but few say it as earnestly as "I wish I were rich." We know what it is to think we should be glad to see a person; we know what it is to listen with bated breath, to strain the vision which would fain see a beloved form, to feel the heart grow suddenly cold with disappointment, or fill to overflowing with rapture, according as our wish is denied or granted. Everything depends upon how much want we have. We can pray in cold tones and formal words for the afflicted, or we can so wrestle and agonise in prayer that "Speak the word only, and Thy servant shall be healed," shall have power to cleave its way to the very throne of God, and hold His ear and bring His answer down.

We can express our wishes in the same terms, while the feelings that prompt them are as different as light from darkness. "God bless you," is an easy thing to say; we speak it out of mere friendliness, and from the desire to say something kind, and we utter it with quivering lips and gasping breath, when we would almost give our lives in exchange for that blessing, when we feel that it is the only thing that would be of good, when we long for it so intensely that the heart stands still and waits for the answer. "Thy will be done," is another wish of the kind. We utter it in a general way, thinking of the heathen who would be benefited and the world which would be made happier; and we falter it out in quick, sharp cries of our own hearts, looking up to our God through streaming tears, laying ourselves before Him, and knowing that His answer may bring us self-denial, suffering, or death.

We cannot hide from ourselves that our wishes, even those which are the most intense desires of our very souls, are often in vain. We wish, until we are almost consumed with the longing, and yet we are denied. This is no reason for complaint. In very tenderness and love, our Father refuses his children what they cry for, because He knows what is best for them, and sees how foolish they can be. But even when what we wish for is not granted, we are made the better or worse, the stronger or weaker, according as our wishes are good or bad, worthy or unworthy. We may know what manner of persons we are by just looking into our hearts to discover what things we are wishing for.

What *do* we wish for?

As Christians, as those who wish andwho profess to be like Jesus Christ, the Holy One—are we satisfied with our own wishes? He had two wishes—"Father, glorify Thy Name," "Keep those whom Thou hast given Me." His wishes were to honour His Father, and to bless the world. What are our wishes? To get rich, to be honoured and esteemed of men, to fill high places, to win fame, to live happily and comfortably in the world? Oh, if these are our wishes, God forgive us; God help us! We are not Christ-like. If we, even we who profess to be His, could be quite right in our wishing, how different might the world be!

A Reminder.

"FOR ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always." Was it not just like Him—that loving, thoughtful Saviour—who could not let any need escape Him—to give His disciples this reminder? Selfishness is such an easily besetting sin, that it might have been that even His people should allow themselves to become so engrossed with their own wants, and so happy in their higher sphere, as to overlook the needy. But now, since He has left the poor as a legacy, and given them into the tender keeping of His friends, they are cared for and watched over.

Especially when the winter comes. Those who love the name of Jesus, and wish to do the work He has given them, will look about to ascertain where the greatest need lies, and how far it can be met. For the Christmas joy is already upon the earth, and hearts begin to beat high with glad anticipations, and to grow soft and warm as hearts should be that understand how peace and goodwill may triumph. There are glad tears in tender, motherly eyes, that look forward over the two or three days now lying between them and the happy time when they will hold their dear ones in their arms. Eyes grown tired and dim with watching the changing scenes of life for so many years brighten again at the sight of the holly and mistletoe. And thousands of children are glad beyond all expression when they remember that it wants "Only one week to Christmas." Surely now, if at any time, with so many mercies round about us, and so much to render us thankful to the God of all mercies—surely, now that the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places, we should remember the poor, and give of our plenty to those who have need.

We are fond of listening again and again for that old song which the angels sang at Bethlehem. But, alas! there are other sounds to be heard here—sounds so much like sighing and wailing that they almost drown the celestial music. If we could stand and listen at some of the doors of our crowded towns, the very thought of peace

and goodwill would seem like a mockery. Sickness, cold, hunger, sin—so gaunt and unlovely are these things that we would fain hide them out of our sight during the glad Christmas time. And so we may, if we can by any means do as our Master did—not overlook, but remove them; not ignore the suffering, but steal it away from writhing forms and weary hearts by giving our aid, and prayers, and kind words. For then, while the December fires burn brightly, and the bells ring, and the song flows, and bright eyes look into ours, and rosy lips give us their love tokens, there will come a deeper peace into our hearts as we hear our Master saying, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me."

Now, what can we do for Him and for His children during the next few weeks? Into how many sad homes may we enter, drawing back the dark curtains of sorrow and letting in the light of Christian love? How many Christmas fires can we light? How many Christmas dinners can we send to empty tables? Are there no little children to whom the gift of a toy would bring an amazing amount of pleasure? No widows' hearts that might be made to sing for joy? No orphans to comfort? No lonely homes which a friendly face might make less sorrowful? If there are none of these things about us, then indeed our Christmas joy must be overshadowed, for we cannot have all the happiness that we might. But "ye have the poor *always* with you." God has not taken them away from our midst, singling us out in that way. His legacy lasts longer than that. And we may have, in addition to all other joys, the joy of doing good.

Builders.

"So built we the wall, . . . for the people had a mind to work."—NEHEMIAH iv. 6.

ONE question that we are very likely to ask ourselves is, "What shall we *do?*" And having asked it, we shall find no lack of replies, for indeed there is so much to be done that the great difficulty seems to be what we can do first, and what we can afford to leave undone. There is clearly no time to lose, and if we would do anything we must begin at once, and keep on every day. Perhaps never before was there such a demand for earnest workers as at the present time. To be slothful now, when the cry of our Master, "Go, work to-day in My vineyard," is ringing in our ears, must surely be a grave offence even in the eyes of our forgiving, tolerant Lord. His enemies are not slothful; day and night they are at work, striving to undermine and pull down the temple of the Lord. Unbelievers, scoffers, foes in the guise of very zealous friends, are striving with a mighty resolution to hinder the great work. The skill of hate, the patience of malice, the power of Satan are brought to bear upon it, and with a vigilance that never ceases, a pertinacity worthy of a better cause, the destroyers work on.

But those who are on the Lord's side are stronger, wiser, more enduring than they. It is worth while to read over again Nehemiah's description of the building of the wall. It shows what can be done "when the people have a mind to work." We live in critical times, but even we cannot do more than they who, "every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon." If they worked and fought, fought and worked while building their wall, shall not we be equally earnest and brave who are builders of even a nobler kind? And as they were successful, as, notwithstanding taunt, ridicule, wrath, and fighting, the wall steadily rose high and strong until the great work was completed; so shall the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ be built up and made strong and beautiful, if only His people have a mind to work.

We can see—even the least observant of us—that there

is a great work ready. Changes are coming which will make our old easy-going performances of our duty altogether inadequate to the wants of the times. We must have skilled workmen for every department of the labour, and no tasks—not even those which seem of the least importance—must be slovenly done. No past successes will suffice for such a future as ours is to be. We must be still more excellent, and earnest, and conscientious in the days to come than in those gone by. Those who are the nobles and the rulers of the minds of the people must be great and good and firm now if they will still be leaders. Sunday-school teachers, to whom the work of the spiritual and even Scriptural education of the young will probably be more than ever entirely entrusted, must study to show themselves good workmen if they would not be ashamed of their part of the wall. And everybody who works for Jesus must be more self-forgetful and devoted in the good days that are coming.

There is, indeed, only one thing needed to make this a grand time. It is that the people should have a mind to work. If only a few—and they themselves from a sense of duty merely—go forth to the work, it is so great that it cannot be done. The *people*, the masses of those who are Christ's, need to be stirred to enthusiasm, and have their hearts in the work, and then the thing shall be done. We can but believe that more would have been done long ago, but that many have minded their own things and not those of the Lord. If those only who are nominally the Church of Christ were all builders instead of so many lookers-on, would there not be a mighty change for the better? If every Christian made a solemn resolution, and by God's blessing carried it out, that for one whole year at least, he or she would work for Jesus, what a wonderful influence it would have on the whole world. Of course much has been done already by this mighty army of workers, but are there many who are doing so much that they cannot possibly do more?

Can we do better than take these two words of Nehemiah to our hearts, "So I prayed to the God of heaven," and "So built we the wall, for the people *had a mind to work*."

May I Not Work?

May I not work for the Master?
There are hundreds of eager hands,
There are thousands of eyes uplifted,
Waiting for His commands.
There are many in love's glad triumph,
Working for Him alway,
Spoken to, owned, directed—
And *I*?—must I only pray?

May I not work for the Master?
Glad of the lowliest place,
I would delve in the dark and in silence,
Far from the light of His face,
If only He would accept me,
By so much as a whispered word;
If so I might give the homage,
That deep in my heart is stirred.

May I not work for the Master?
I cannot be strong or wise,
To stand in the front of the battle,
Or to cope with the doubts that rise.
I only am strong to love Him,
I only am wise to see
The bliss of His own true servants—
And can He find work for me?

May I not work for the Master?
Oh ye who have laboured long,
With His love and His smiles upon you,
And your hearts o'er full of song;
It is not to take your places
My spirit yearns to-day;
I would take my stand with the lowest,
And silently work and pray.

May I not work for the Master?
I will be bold to-day,
Pressing a little nearer,
Till He lists to the words I say;
And I think that He will not chide me,
Nor send me away still sad,
But will give me some little service,
That shall render me ever glad.

"He must Increase."

ONE of the hardest things which human nature has to bear is coming down in the world. It is very pleasant to ascend; even though a little giddiness may be experienced we would far rather go up higher than begin to descend. We cannot like to occupy lower positions than formerly; we would far rather climb than stoop, and we imagine that we can do the former far more gracefully than the latter. So fond are we of high places, and the honours that congregate there, that we can scarcely bear to look with generous eyes upon those who have outstripped us and are on pinnacles that overtop our own. It seems natural rather to envy and suspect than to esteem and congratulate those who rise higher and still higher above us.

That is human nature; but happily for us there is a Divine nature interwoven with our own, which can enable even mortal men to say with no sadness in the tone, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It is possible to look on and smile while another takes the preference; it is possible to rejoice in empty hands because others are filled; it is possible to take the lowest places quietly and contentedly, with no bitterness in the heart or upon the lips; but he who is able to do it shows by his very acts to what school he belongs, and who has been his teacher. That Lord who was the personification of unselfish, undying, infinite *Love* can alone instruct His disciples in the beautiful art of preferring one another. And we may be assured that wherever this spirit of retirement, and

humility, and self-sacrifice is seen, it is His Spirit imparted to humanity.

There is plenty of scope for its practice. We may all exhibit this courtesy if we will, on every day of our lives. But some have more opportunity than others. Those who walk in the lowly ways of life are especially called upon to stand aside, while others swifter of foot pass on before them. Parents, too, know well what it means, and the mother's heart is generally engaged in preferring another before herself. But if any are able to do this great thing well it must be because they have great love. Those who, while weeping for themselves, can "rejoice with them that do rejoice," must have tender hearts with something of the heroic in them, and then the satisfaction which they derive from seeing the welfare of others will have power to make them happier than all beside.

But if we would have the truest, greatest joy which can be had on earth, it must come from the same source as that of the brave and leal John the Baptist. How could he be other than willing and glad that his own fame and honour should decrease when it was that He might be the greater who was the Redeemer of the world? He—this stern but humble man—gives to us a glimpse, a hint of his great happiness. "The friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth him rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled: He must increase, but I must decrease." And to many since the days of the Baptist has been given the same joy, for men and women have often had to be nothing that He might be all, have taken cheerfully the spoiling of their goods for His sake, have counted their lives as worthless, that a testimony might be borne to His name; and so in poverty and shame and loneliness have understood and drank to the full the mysterious joy of the bridegroom's friend.

If only we could all have more of it in our daily lives, how much higher and nobler those lives would be! If we could rejoice, not because we are successful, but because Christ's kingdom is flourishing and men are everywhere thronging to bring their gifts to Him, we should not be so stunted and meagre and half-happy as we are. Alas! it is only occasionally that we feel the ecstasy of those

who lose themselves in zeal for the Saviour's kingdom. May we more and more live in the spirit of the glorious doxology: "His name shall endure for ever; His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen."

Special Prayer.

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

COULD anything be plainer or more satisfactory? Could any words by any possible means be made to express more that is calculated to give comfort and assurance to the believer?

Then why do we not take our Lord at His word?

Why do we not trust in Him? Why do we not ask and receive the blessings that would make us happy?

Are they mere words which have received no confirmation?

Not so. A thousand times have two or more of His followers met to plead with Him, and reminding Him of His promise have asked for some particular blessing, and gone away to find the answer already given, the blessing vouchsafed.

In a certain class in a Sunday-school, was one converted scholar—only one—after many days. He and his teacher met together one evening in each week to beseech of God that His Spirit might be poured out in the class, and that *all* the other members of it might be brought to Him. It was a great thing to ask, but the petitioners had faith, and their prayers were not in vain. A change came over the thoughtless boys one by one. One by one they went to

Jesus for pardon, one by one they joined together to pray for the rest, until all could sing the triumphant song, "There is now therefore no condemnation."

One daughter in a family is brought to God. No sooner has she begun to walk in the light than she is most solicitous for the eternal welfare of those who are dear to her. At first she prays alone, then her mother unites with her. For many months these two hold a prayer-meeting once every day, and then they have the joy of seeing that the hard hearts are softened, that the careless ones are asking, "What must I do to be saved?" and that all are turning to God.

A valuable life is in danger. There comes a time when one who is beloved by many lies at the very edge of the river of death. All is done that can be; the men of greatest skill are doing their best, every precaution has been taken, and there is nothing to do but wait. Ah, no! the most important thing has yet to be done. On the eve of the crisis there is a prayer-meeting; a few gather together and earnestly beseech of God that He will spare useful lives for future usefulness. There is no other way in which the loving solicitude of friends can be calmed. There is no other way in which they can do anything. But that is enough. The Great Physician listens, speaks the word, and there are glad tidings for the supplicators.

Have we not known many cases of this kind? and yet there are some blessings very great, very necessary, and we do not get them. We have not because we ask not; we hunger because we will not pray for bread.

Oh, that we believed what the Master has said, and knew the efficacy of prayer! What joy, and peace, and healing might come to this sorrowful world, even through our instrumentality! What can we say to our Father for neglecting to use the great power which He has given us?

Lightly Spoken Words.

It seems too much trouble to be very particular about such common things as words. We have so many to speak from the time that we arise in the morning to the time when, wearied out, we are able to allow our speaking powers a little repose. They are so many in number that, as for remembering them, or considering them, or caring about them, it is not to be expected of us. We are too busy. We have too much to do to be always thinking about what we had better say. And that accounts for our lightly spoken words, which, whether we wish it or not, whether we utter them consciously or unconsciously, do so much harm in the world.

What wrong ideas are put into the heads of children through lightly spoken words; what terrible fears haunt them! what distressing dreams startle their slumbers! what odd notions cling to them, even through life, because some mirthful, joke-loving person chooses to speak light words to them! We have all our memories of ideas so ridiculous that we can afford to laugh at them in our succeeding hours of wisdom, which found their places, and lived, and grew, and did plenty of mischief, too, from the same cause. But now that it is our turn it is well if we are warned by our own experience, and do not too early puzzle the poor little brains, which have plenty of work before them, with lightly spoken words.

Quite a fourth of the sorrow which darkens over the skies, and rests like a hideous nightmare on the breasts of weary men, has been caused by some lightly spoken words uttered at some time or other. What aching hearts have been made, not only through absolutely cruel words, but merely light ones. There have been hungerings which have received a stone instead of bread. There have been great wants, which strong, earnest words only could satisfy, and the speaker who might have done so much has had only "trifles light as air" to give. There have been questions, on the answers to which so much has depended that the querist has held his breath, and felt as if his whole life waited, and when the reply has come it

has been so light, so worthless, that a laugh would have been as good.

Sometimes the effects are even worse. Christians should speak no light words, especially on solemn subjects, but they do. Are there never times when the young, or some whose hearts have been newly awakened, seek wisdom, and receive only folly? Are there never hours devoted to utter frivolity which might bear on their wings the greatest blessings which could be given? Christians must sometimes afford matter for very great surprise to others. They have listened and understood the wise words of Him who spoke as never man spoke, but when it came to their turn they had only light words to utter.

Oh, the want and the mischief, the poverty of soul, the dearth of love, the ache, and sorrow, and weariness which come from lightly spoken words which we may never recal!

If we have kept all our other good resolutions, and are at a loss to know what to do next, might we not resolve to refrain from uttering them? Might we not pray that He who giveth to all liberally would teach us to talk wisely?

Looking Forward.

HAVE you ever noticed what an effect a bright morning coming, say in winter, has on the spirits and the temper? We become pacified and good-humoured when the skies are blue instead of dun, and the sun floods the whole world with beauty instead of mist and snow and rain. But the reason why bright days contribute so much to the general harmony is simply because they are earnests of what is to follow. They are promises; and the promise of the spring is a very welcome thing. Of course we tell ourselves that anticipation is only a secondary thing, that we live in the present, and always act as if the joy we have is sufficient. But in reality we live in anticipation, and it may be questioned whether hope is not really a

more enjoyable thing than possession. Even the bright June roses with their wealth of splendour cannot touch our hearts with so much joy as the first little harbinger of spring—the delicate snowdrop. As the months pass and the days broaden into the magnificent summer time, we shall gaze on landscapes of beauty, scenes where miles of green meadow land, and fields of waving corn, and the majesty of forests, are spread open before us, and we shall drink deep draughts of delight. But will even that equal the joy with which we see the first little flowers in our gardens, or the bursting buds in the hedgerows?

Promises are always dear to us, especially if they are those which we know will be kept. We are like children still. How pleased they are with promises. They are kept patient under pain, cheerful under disappointment, quiet in times of discomfort, hopeful in even sorrow and tears, by promises. But they have such confidence. They never dream of broken vows and words unkept: a promise is enough for them. Afterward, when they see life as it is, when they have been deceived and betrayed where they trusted the most fully, they begin to doubt and become incredulous with regard to promises. But from infancy to old age we cannot help looking forward, and there was need of the poet's warning in the well-known words—

"Trust no future, howe'er pleasant."

We live in a land of promise, and one Friend never deceives. Night comes, but it brings with it the promise of the day; winter lingers, but even it bids us hope for the summer; sorrow falls, but even as we feel the stroke we hear the word which tells us how that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

How otherwise could we live through the sadness and darkness that encompass our lives? The children would be frightened but that they have the Father's promises. "Surely I will be with Thee." "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Who could fear with such good words from Him who has never failed? Who cares for a little present discomfort and suffering, when we know that in a little while our sorrow shall be turned into joy?

And we should find it a much more difficult thing to live if it were not that "this is not our rest." While the storms rage and the sky is overcast, we are listening to a still small voice which tells us of calm and sunshine and everlasting spring. And though the way be rough and long, we press on with rapid feet and glad hearts, for we hear a voice, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

Sunday Evening.

It is a good sight, that of thousands of people pouring out from the places where they have met to worship God according to the way which appears most right to them. The last song has died out, the multitudes have bent their heads while the benediction has been spoken, and now they will turn their backs to the sanctuary, and their faces to the world and the week. There is a calm look upon many of their faces, a placid joy lighting their eyes, which is very different from the care-worn and pained expression which they bore on the Saturday evening; and we may hope that the Master has been to the feast, that they have laved aching head and sorrowful heart in the waters of the river—"the streams whereof make glad the city of our God"—that their worship has not been in appearance only, but that they have received into their very hearts the Saviour's blessing of peace. How precious Sundays are! What boons they are to us! And how much good we drive from them we do not really know. And yet many do understand it sufficiently to fight vigorously for it against those who would rob us of the sacred day.

But it is wonderful how soon, even on Sunday evening, the feeling of quiet and devotion wears off. It does, perhaps, last until we reach home—that is if we have not far to walk—and it may be that before or after supper an additional hymn is sung, and the evening prayer is a little longer than usual; but when that is over, "the *Sunday feeling*" passes rapidly away. Conversation glides

from the sermon to the man who preached it, and from him away to the people who listened, and from them to the general topics of the day, and then to the week and its duties and cares, and swiftly in comes the world, and away goes the Sabbath with its holy thoughts and solemn exercises. Now, might we not, with real benefit to ourselves, keep out the intruder and keep in the friend, at least for an hour or two longer?

It is wonderful how clever some people are at shortening Sunday. They retire late on Saturday night, and lie in bed two or three hours longer on Sunday morning. Then away to church or chapel (a little late), and they manage to sit through the service with only a few signs of impatience. In the afternoon, of course there is the nap, which as it cannot be indulged in all the week, has to be a long one to make up for arrears. Then there is the evening service, and after that, "Let us go to bed early to-night, for to-morrow is Monday, a busy day, and we must be up betimes." And so altogether this day, the best day —the Lord's-day, is curtailed as much as possible, and narrowed down to the very smallest size, even by some who wish it to be understood that they would on no account break the Fourth Commandment.

And whatever may be said of Sunday evening, people do not always enter the sanctuary in the early part of the day with very devotional feelings. Their brain is quite in a whirl; the Sabbath has scarcely begun to them; the work and worry have scarcely subsided; and when they take their seat in the pew, and the sacred stillness begins to steal over them they are painfully conscious that their minds are scarcely in a fit state for worship. There is no doubt that we should have happier Sundays if we could all commence them on Saturday night; if, instead of the noise of the market, and the clamour of the streets, and the pressure of unaccomplished work, there could be the prayer-meeting, or the short service, or a time for quiet communion with God and preparation for the Sabbath.

There will come a time when there will be no Sunday *evenings*, when the night shadows will not fall, and when the song will not cease. Happy as are our days of worship here, we get very tired; the strain is almost too much and

too long for us. But in heaven we shall praise Him day and night without weariness. Oh, let us pray that these Sundays may be only preparation days for that joyous, eternal Sabbath of rest and sacred employment!

Dropped.

It is wonderful how many things get dropped and lost on the journey of life. We are so intent upon hastening forward, we look so eagerly towards the goal which we are longing to attain, that we often do not notice until we miss them how many treasures we have left behind on our way. It is true, however, whether we know it or not, that notwithstanding our acquisitiveness, our economy, and our storing, we become much poorer as the years go on. And it is curious how we try to mislead ourselves in the matter. We say that we "are rich and increased in goods;" we try to believe that we are greater and stronger and more wealthy, because we see that there are at least some things which time gives us in exchange for those which he takes away. But if we were courageous enough to face the truth and acknowledge it to ourselves, we should admit that we are not gainers but losers. We start upon our journey with the consciousness of possessing some valuables, and with the expectation of gathering more as we go along. We stoop occasionally, and pick up what looks very fair, and alas! we do not notice that in the effort to do so we have loosened our grasp of what was better worth the keeping. And often it is not until the evening comes, and we sit down to count our gains and losses, that we find what is the true state of our affairs.

Perhaps we first notice how many friends we drop as the years pass on. We start with a good many, and in this respect are far richer than we think. But they do not all go with us to the end. We are stricken with grief when the first disappears; but after a time we are so used to it that we are hardened, and our tears fall less copiously.

Sometimes we lose our friends by death, and then there

is a pathos and a tenderness about the loss that encourages our grief, and causes us to mourn for them with a lamentation that is not unmingled with sweetness. But far oftener we drop our friends, or they loosen themselves from our hold while living. The loss may be caused by

> "A something light as air, a look,
> A word unkind, or wrongly taken;"

or there may be a gradual falling apart from no perceptible cause whatever. It may be that circumstances remove them from our sight, and other interests coming in gradually displace them from our hearts until they are crowded out altogether. Whatever may be the cause, the fact is the same—we drop many friends as we pass along. Of course new ones may come to take their places, but new ones can seldom be to us what the old were. And though they may help to make the solitary places glad, and though a few of the old ones may remain, yet when we think of those who have fallen from us we cannot help feeling a little like the trees that the autumn has stripped of their leaves.

Also, as we get on with our journey we find that we have lost a good deal of the vigour of mind and body with which we started. How strong and eager were our thoughts in those happy days. We never understood that thought was work; we thought because we enjoyed it, because we could not help it. We never dreamed of brains wearing out, nor of nervous headaches which should one day show how much we had lost. Then how strong we were physically! what a pleasure it was to see how much we could do, what weights we could lift, how far and how fast we could run! How different it all is when years have passed! What has become of all our strength? Life itself is labour, and toil most wearisome. We do not lift any burden of our own accord; we begin to bend beneath those that life obliges us to carry. As for running, jumping, and climbing, we gave up those amusements long ago. We have enough to do to walk soberly; sometimes we can do little more than creep. And so, though we are not particularly eager to admit the fact even to ourselves, we find that we have dropped, and for ever lost, some physical treasures as we came along.

And, what is almost more painful, we have lost many things that contributed to the nobility of our youth. We had hope once, but what has become of it now? How we dreamed, and anticipated, and longed. Earth was a splendid place when we first began to notice it; and it was to be more radiant still in the future. Of course we had some disappointments, but we recovered them rapidly, and soon believed that even they were for the best. This buoyancy would stand us in good stead now—but it has gone. We fear much more than we hope, and despair comes more easily to the surface than exultation. Much of our faith in mankind is gone too. How beautiful is the humility and self-depreciation which characterises youth. It was so easy and so pleasant to respect others. Veneration had all opportunity for the display of its meek spirit. We were grateful then for the love with regard to which since we have only become exacting. We mistrusted our own powers of pleasing, and were conscious of no dignity which we were bound to maintain.

> "And yet, O good, O wise and true!
> I would for all my fealty
> That I could be as much to you
> As you to me"

was the sort of longing which filled us with regard to those who were dearest to us. But unhappily that feeling grows scarce as the years pass on. A closer acquaintance with our fellows, eyes that learn to see their defects as well as their excellences, are too often successful in stealing away the deference we had, and substituting self-love for it. People are not nearly as good as we thought they were; and so by degrees we become suspicious and proud and hard. And, what is even worse to bear, we are disappointed in ourselves, and lose our hope of doing or being aught that is good.

Some things, however, we should gain in exchange for those that we lose. If we cannot have vigour we should at least have patience. If we cannot do, we should have learnt how to endure. And the discipline of life has done little for us if, having taught us how we fail in all things, and how far from perfect our fellows are, it has not also increased our reverence for, and perfected our hope in, the holy Saviour. The years that steal from us so much

of all that is earthly and human enrich us with confidence and trust in Him. We know what at first we were only told, that He is a friend who loveth at all times. And we believe too that He, coming with us along the journey, gathers up the treasures we drop. So they are not lost, for He takes care of them. He is saving them for us, and one day, who knows but that He will give them all back to us—friends, vigour, simplicity of character, everything that we mourn as having lost with our youth? And in the meantime we know what to do—"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

The Winds.

"Stormy wind fulfilling His word."

PEOPLE are not generally very partial to strong winds, though we have them so often that we might be expected to get used to them. But we have, perhaps, a dislike to things that by their great strength compel us to feel, if not to confess, our own weakness. And though it is now and then exceedingly pleasant and invigorating to do battle with the wind, yet as the victory is decided beforehand, and there is the certainty that we shall grow tired long enough before our opponent does, it is not all pleasure. It is rather trying to one's dignity to stand at street corners, and be whisked about as if of no more consequence than straw, and be utterly unable to move until the fury of the wind shall have become less for a few moments. Who can possibly move statelily and feel grandly in a gale of wind, especially with one's hat merrily careering twenty or thirty yards in advance of its owner?

But it would be well if such little inconveniences were the only ones felt from the high winds. There is a sense of comfort in resting within the strong walls of home while outside the wind-storms are raging, and making wild music among the bare branches of bending trees. But who can listen to them in any part of our island

without remembering what destructive power they possess? How many persons with kind hearts send up earnest prayers, "God have mercy upon our seamen," to the accompaniment of the winds! And how sad it seems to us when the report reaches us of the havoc caused by these terrible wreckers!

And yet we believe and know that though these destructive elements seem to be altogether let loose, there is a Hand that holds them and has them under perfect control. Above all the noises they cause, there is a still small voice of mighty power which even they recognise and obey—"Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further." And when we would murmur at fair lives cut off, or strong men gone down into the deeps, what can we say when we remember that these stormy winds are fulfilling His will, who is kind, and merciful, and long-suffering, and gracious, and who tells us of father's love and mother's tenderness when He wishes to teach of Himself? What can we do but be silent, and patient, and trustful, saying, "He is good, and doeth good continually;" "He hath done all things well?"

We know what wind-storms are in our own lives. We know what it is to be blown about, and shaken, and filled with terror, while all the defences we have raised for our own safety are split like canvas in the gale. And we can no more understand it than can the poor sailors in their distresses. Only we know that even the winds do good, that they are sent, not by an angry Judge, but by our Father, and that all His purposes are wise and kind. These winds that are so hard to bear, that try our patience and fortitude, and courage, come from a loving Friend—come indeed from Him who will Himself shelter us from the rough blast. Let us wait, and look up to Him with no thought of rebellion or complaint. The winds will purify us, and make us more firmly rooted in faith. And though they may howl, and sometimes almost terrify us, let our prayer be that every blast may be turned into a spiritual blessing.

"Oh, that the storm which scattereth
Each earth-born hope abroad,
May anchor those of holier birth
More firmly on our God!"

Prayer-meetings.

"THE fashion of this world passeth away"—even in the matter of prayer-meetings; for prayer-meetings, at one time everywhere recognised as a valuable and blessed means of grace, are now decidedly out of fashion, and few people are unfashionable enough to attend them. Some congregations, indeed, continue to hold them, perhaps once a week, but among others they are altogether discontinued. Even in places where they are not quite superseded there is a great and, as we think, a lamentable lack of interest manifested. Congregations, numbering at the Sunday services eleven or twelve hundred persons, are content if fifty attend the weekly prayer-meeting. And that this paucity is not compulsory is evident from the increased numbers which gather if a lecture is to be delivered or an entertainment given. That it is "only a prayer-meeting," appears to be quite reason enough for the absence of any.

That this should be the case with those are merely members of the congregation, who only come to the house of God on the Sabbath-day from a sense of duty and because they scarcely know how otherwise to employ their time, is not surprising. But is there not reason for regret that the same spirit of indifference is in those whom Jesus Himself has taught to pray, and who know the importance of prayer?

It would not matter so very much if public prayer were neglected only that private prayer might be more earnestly and frequently offered; but is this really the case? Is it not more than probable that when the prayer-meetings are badly attended it is only a sign that the true spirit of prayer has, for a time at least, departed from us?

And yet, even in those towns and villages where the prayer-meetings are the worst attended, the people can be got to feel an interest in prayer. Any special effort—a watch-night service, a united prayer-meeting—will be attended by large numbers. And perhaps this is only another proof that the common meetings would be more blessed if those who lead the devotions had some special

message to the throne of grace, instead of offering long, lifeless prayers—the same things over and over again in the same unmoved manner. Short, special, earnest petitions, clothed not in grand but in simple words, asking for the things we need, are the prayers that all love to join in. Long dissertations are only wearying.

We must have more prayer, both public and private. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear." He would still send mighty blessings if His people asked for them. Let all who look hopefully to the work before them resolve that they will pray as well as work. Let those who cannot go and fight the battles of the Lord be earnest in entreating His blessing upon those who do. And let those who are weary and heavy-laden meet as often as possible where Jesus who gives His children rest has promised to meet also. The way to be wise, and strong, and successful is to pray. The way to be quiet and peaceful, and truly happy is to be in frequent communion with God.

There are some congregations among which prayer-meetings are fully recognised as blessings where many go constantly and where God always comes. Are not these churches the ones blessed above many? Is it not there that the power of the Holy Spirit is felt, and Christ known in all His glory?

"O, come let *us* worship and bow down, let *us* kneel before the Lord our Maker."

Giving.

"Lend, hoping for nothing again."

Now, who ever heard of doing such an unbusiness-like thing as that? If it were not in the Bible, what should we think of such a maxim? Who does think of it even now? What father, starting his son in life, ever gives him this among other directions? It looks like a thing that "wouldn't answer." It has not a bit of worldly wisdom

in it. It is widely different from two other pieces of advice we have heard—one of which is, "Never do anything without asking, Will it pay?" and the other, "Get money, my son,—get money; honestly if you can—but get money." Now, if we place the Master's injunction by the side of these—"Lend, hoping for nothing again,"—does it not look either impossible or incongruous?

It is certainly not the kind of lending that we are used to. It is true that even now-a-days we see by newspaper advertisements that there is a class of liberal persons willing, and even anxious, to lend their money on "easy terms" "to persons in difficulty," at the "shortest notice,"—"strictest privacy guaranteed." But who believes in such lending as that? Everybody knows that they lend hoping for a great deal more again. But most of our lending is on the same principle. We are a very mercenary set of beings, with a quick eye for profits, and a mind on the look-out for *good* investments only.

Giving is not an easy thing. We talk, somewhat boastingly, about the liberality of the present age, and the many agencies for good which are in exercise. But what work it is to get the necessary funds! What lectures, and sermons, and appeals have to be directed at us before the money is collected! What begging letters and printed reports and entreaties have to be heaped upon us before we respond! What numbers of collecting cards, and plates held at doors, and boxes placed in conspicuous places, have to win our attention before sufficient cash can be gained for any good purpose! Said a thinker, "When people know how to give, and understand the blessedness of it, there will be no farther need of bazaars." And, though they may have done good in their time, and are pleasant places to go to, there certainly remains the fact that the money might have been given without them. Only, you see, that would be lending, hoping for nothing again; while in this case we can triumphantly carry away a small parcel in exchange for our shilling!

It is true there is a right and a wrong way of giving. There is a proverb,—not a bad one either,—which says, "Be just as well as generous." We are expected to feel nothing but admiration for those good men whose biographies we read, who were celebrated for giving away their

last shilling to any ragged person who asked for it, but who were also celebrated for being always in debt, and who died at last leaving wives and children totally unprovided for. Some of us feel a great deal more contempt than admiration for these generous gentlemen. But then, that is the wrong way of giving. We feel inclined to say, Give by all means, but let it be your own money, and not another's, that you subscribe; and then *give heartily*, neither grudgingly, nor fearfully, nor stintingly.

Perhaps there never was such a want of money as in the present day. Money would buy a stranger's home where Christian people might be masters and matrons, and where wanderers might have a night's lodging free of expense in comfort and decency. We cannot go through the streets without grieving for the little children and singing Mrs. Browning's touching "Song for the Ragged-schools" over again. But money would clothe, and educate, and feed these children, and place them in homes which should be more than mockeries of the sacred name. But indeed money can do so much that really needs doing that it is useless to begin to enumerate what things cry out for it.

We are, to use a homely phrase, stingy. Can we say that we give *anything liberally?* Whom do we trust with all our heart? Whom do we love, "hoping for nothing again?" Whom do we praise with an open-souled, shadowless praise? Most of us are niggardly in all our givings. And yet, is it not too bad when we have received so much?

Cheerfulness.

"A MERRY heart doeth good like a medicine," said a very wise man, and no one will dare or care to contradict him. If Solomon made a mistake, who can hope to judge? Such a man as he, with a thousand cares upon him, and a multitude of things to see to, and with a reputation for wisdom to keep up, must have known how to appreciate the blessing of a cheerful companion.

But in that respect he was not more wise than the rest

of us. We all know how valuable a person is he or she who has a merry heart. For we find the world such a serious place, and have so much to do and bear in it, that it is a relief to be made to laugh ourselves, or, failing that, to see some one who can. We suppose that in these earnest times professional jesters are not to be bought at any price; but for the sake of our countenances, and our health of body and mind, it is a pity that there is not a little more real fun in the world. Those who do not care for anything that is light and trifling speak very severely about the growing love of excitement and the rage for amusements which appear to be so prevalent, especially among the young; but who can tell but these things, or something which shall answer their purpose, are really necessary? On the whole, it appears that there is not too much laughter in the world. At least, it seems as if it is all done by a few; it needs to become more general, and it would be well if it could be universal.

The man who has the power to make others laugh is almost sure to be a favourite in society, if his humour be of a harmless and generous kind. He may not be respected as much as he who is wise, but he will at least have done a little good in his life, if for an evening he can make world-weary men forget their cares. For hope follows cheerfulness. If you have a burden upon you, so great that you do not know how to carry it, and one succeeds in diverting your thoughts from it for a time, you will find that when you next think of it, it is with a greater elasticity of spirit. And though a burden is a burden all the world over, it is often great or little according to our way of looking at it.

That household is greatly blessed the members of which have cheerful dispositions. It is a good thing, indeed, when the head sets the example. He has plenty in the outer world to ruffle the serenity of his temper, but he deserves to be held in high esteem, and carefully copied by all young men if he always makes a point of throwing off the disagreeable as soon as he reaches home. There, supposing him to have made the effort on his own account, it soon becomes easy. The mother of the house is not perfect, but still she can bear patiently the little vexations of life, and refuses to allow herself to be worried into

fretfulness or gloom. With such parents, of course, the children are gay enough. They salute the home-comers with laughing words, they have the merriest tales to tell and the best jokes to make. They are not full of their own pains and troubles; indeed, they have forgotten that they had any. The evening has come, perhaps, but the very atmosphere of the room is sunny. And no one can can be in long without feeling lighter of heart and more hopeful of spirit.

If we cannot have a cheerful household, then, it is good to have one merry heart among us. There are persons whose presence in the house makes a great difference. It is very quiet when they are away, and there is all the time a sense of something wanting. As soon as they come all the rooms seem filled. There is a strong, clear voice singing or talking, and no place seems any longer dull and silent. We meet them on the stairs, and their faces are as bright as June suns, and a great deal brighter than some we have known. We begin to smile back again, and to find ourselves actually humming a lively air, which we thought we had forgotten. Our work is not so hard, the day is not so dim, life is not so dull as it seemed before they came. And who can deny but that these cheerful persons are among the benefactors of our race?

One thing is very strange. It is that Christian people are not more frequently cheerful. They ought to be. They really have not anything to make them miserable. If they believe what they say they do, they ought to be brave when they are timid, singing when they are sighing, smiling when they are weeping. They have no business with long faces and whining voices, and dreary ditties about vales of tears and howling wildernesses. They have a Friend, strong and tender, who has promised to care for them. They have a home which is perfectly happy and is free from every sorrow. And when God bids them rejoice and be exceeding glad, ought they not at least to be cheerful?

The Census.

We were brought back to the world after the peace of a communion Sunday, and the repose of a quiet night, by a catechetical examination one Monday morning. Wherever we were, at home, or visiting at the house of a friend or a stranger, the same questions were propounded to us. "What is your name and surname? What is your relation to the head of the family? What is your condition—single, married, or widowed? What is your sex? How old where you last birthday? What is your rank or occupation? Where were you born?" It was rather a formidable ordeal for those in whom the organ of secretiveness is marked by phrenologists as "very large." And it was decidedly trying to the temper of those who have a peculiar dislike to publishing any fact about themselves, and would rather hide behind a cloud of mystery to the end of their days. No doubt, although education, civilisation and general enlightenment have taken place since the last census was taken, the registrars and their assistants had not altogether an easy time of it. And although no suspicion of any undue freedom, or interference, or curiosity, can have been excited, we can well understand how some people who never will tell the truth if they can help it, have failed to do so now.

It is to be hoped, however, that for the sake of the great importance which is attached to the act of taking the census, truthful returns have been made by the help of the "Family Bible," and other means. And then what will come of it? Will our legislators see that notwithstanding all that they have done little children still work in the field and the factory when they ought to be at school? Will they ascertain how many under twelve years of age are growing old and worn out before their time because they have to work for so many long weary hours? Will the thousands who live by other people's labour have had the courage to avow it so that the State may subtract the drones from the working bees? Has there been for once a rare exhibition of honesty among the thousands who have earned the distinction of a right to insert the

word "thief" under the heading "Profession" in the census paper? Will some wise laws follow which shall regulate the demand and supply of certain occupations? Will the thousands of women who are half-starving upon the miserable pittances which some work produces, be shown a better and a fairer way of living? If a few of such reforms follow the taking of the census no one will be sorry at the personal examination he has undergone.

No doubt the filling of the schedules by the heads of households has sometimes been done a little sorrowfully. What changes have happened during the last ten years; and how differently the papers have been filled. The children are grown up, and are away in homes of their own. Some wanderers are in other lands, and have nothing to do with the population of Britain. And some, alas! how many! who belong to the family, and are indeed the dearest members of it, are not mentioned at all in the census-paper, but have their record upon the white tombstone in the green grave-yard.

Well, but it does not matter so very much if they have gone up to that other home, and are among the multitude which no man can number. Their names though omitted here are "in the Lamb's book of life." The head of the family here is no longer in any way responsible for them; but they are safe, and numbered among the redeemed in the presence of the Lord. And we who tell our names and the places of our birth now know that soon we too shall have changed our state; and shall be where the peoples of every land dwell together in one happy home.

Rubbish Wanted.

THOSE who walk about the outskirts of towns, where eligible plots of building-ground are to be let, may frequently see the announcement, "Rubbish may be shot here." In some districts, indeed, where the soil is damp and a good foundation is necessary, the placards go farther still and

make the invitation less indifferent and more pressing, by putting it in this form, "*Rubbish wanted.*"

It is very suggestive. No doubt many persons reading it in certain moods have felt a regret that the request cannot be fully granted, and all kinds of rubbish shot there in about the only place where they can be of any use. The kind of stuff that will be brought is such as worn-out building materials, broken bricks, stones, refuse, &c., but is it not a pity that several other sorts cannot be carted in the same direction?

For instance, if the rubbish were taken out of the literature of the day what a heap there would be! What ton loads of good paper made into bad penny numbers of trashy sensational stories! What numbers of even high-priced periodicals might lose a good part of their pages in consequence of their being consigned to the rubbish heap! How many three-volumed novels might also be brought to the same spot; for even the most inveterate novel-readers of our day will admit that in their visits to the circulating library they too often only succeed in getting books which are of no possible good. Sometimes, indeed, we may go much farther, and say that they are positively pernicious, and the only proper place for them is not the library or the hands of our maidens, but the rubbish heap.

Many of the fashions of the day might be brought to the same place, and everybody would be the gainer. Alarming, not to say disgusting, particulars have lately been published in certain articles of the daily press relative to the human-hair market. Who that has read them but must feel that the proper place for the immense quantities of hair which are imported into this country from such various and questionable sources is not the window of the hair-dresser, far less the heads of our English girls and women, but that spot where rubbish is wanted? And might not some other things go at the same time? Paints and cosmetics, and high heels and tight stays, for instance?

It is almost a pity that certain characteristics of some persons cannot be taken from them and deposited also on the rubbish heap. What pride and vanity and utter frivolity spoil some of our girls! What littleness and ignorance and self-indulgence mar some of our young

men! What foolish practices are rife among us! How many are falling into the vices of drinking and gambling and living beyond their means! And would it not be well if these things could be taken from our midst and put where rubbish is wanted?

For it ought to be understood that in our world and in these days rubbish is not generally wanted. What is wanted is quite the reverse. The times are great, and great men and women should live in them. We ought to be very much in earnest. Wisdom, dignity of character, self-control, diligence, perseverance, talent, all are wanted; but there is no room for rubbish. Our eyes should be all lifted upward, and our course be an onward one. To be as good and do as much good as we can, this is the demand made upon us now. To think pure and noble thoughts, and speak strong and powerful words is our duty, the duty of every man and woman, old or young, amongst us.

And if we are to rise as we might we must have keen eyes to separate the rubbish from what is valuable. Have we not been a little too lenient to ourselves if not to others? Let us try to be better and to make all around us better by the force of a good example. For if this were done there would be considerably less rubbish in the world.

Stir.

We have seen a heap of dead leaves lying quite silent and motionless, attracting no attention, doing no good, being simply trodden upon; but suddenly there has arisen a fresh breeze, and instantly they begin to fly about in all directions, and to look almost as if they had come to life again. They are stirred by the wind, and whether they were dead leaves in November, or bright green ones in May, we would a thousand times rather see a stir than be gloomily conscious of a still atmosphere and not a breath of fresh air anywhere.

We know that it is possible to have too much stir; the

gentle breeze may increase to a hurricane, and instead of harmless dead leaves mighty forest trees may be uprooted, and the dwellings of man be blown down. But so long as the stir can be kept within moderate limits, is it not preferable to the inactivity and want of life which may be felt upon a breezeless day?

And is it not so with all human affairs? There is such a thing as falling asleep while seeming to be awake, and perhaps few things are more painful to see than the supineness which cares for nothing, but is content to let things go on as they may. Idleness, inertness, absence of all stir, these things have perhaps as much to answer for as sin and malice and vice. It is as much the duty of every one to prevent wrong as to atone for it, and the langour and want of heart which characterise too many are perhaps responsible for some of the evil that is in the world.

Therefore, anything that rouses people from their lethargy, that makes men wake up to think over important subjects, and take sides with what they believe to be the right, is a good thing. There are some inhabitants of our earth, and even the civilised part of it, who do not think at all if they can help it. They go on from day to day, taking things easy, lying still in a drowsy, dead sort of way—very much like the leaves. They can scarcely be called living men; nothing moves them, nothing interests them, they care for nothing. But they ought to be thankful for anything which arouses them from their slumberings and bids them know themselves for immortal beings.

It is wonderful how much good a little stir can do. Even a bad cause can get plenty of followers if its supporters are eager, active men, full of energy and life. And even a good cause cannot be independent of it. What millions of earnest, passionate words will have been spoken, and how materially the cause of good and evil will have been influenced by them, is more than we can say. Only there will be plenty of results from the stir that has been made—results that shall last through years, and influence the world far and wide.

Is there no need of stir among our churches? It is wonderfully easy to settle down into an easy and a careless state of feeling even with regard to religion. Warmth

dies out, and coldness and lethargy take its place. We cannot but confess that much more might be done than is done for the spread of the Gospel and the kingdom of our Lord. Oh, that something would awaken us! Then we should not be sleepily content that so much labour is in vain, that so few persons are added to the Church. If men were as earnest upon this matter as they are upon some others, the poor, and weary, and heavy laden would not go groaning under their heavy burdens until life is wholly dark to them; they would hear the glad message of salvation, they would be told of Him who says, "Come unto Me," and by prayers, by entreaties, by loving hands, they would be brought to the cross, and find rest for their souls.

Cannot we make a stir? Cannot we at least pray until we get the answer, "O Lord, revive Thy work."

Great Possessions.

"SELL whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross and follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions."

What has become of his possessions? And were they so very great after all? Houses and lands, and silver, and gold, and perhaps, as a consequence of these, friends and flatterers in abundance, belonged to the young man. But, looking down upon him from our hills of observation, we see his folly, and gravely shake our wiser heads, knowing so well that if he neglected to secure the treasure in heaven he is poor enough by this time. And thinking of his conduct we have perhaps seen the danger of riches, and understood how the love of money can be the root of all evil, and have even gone so far as to give our unsolicited pity to those who, having riches, find it so hard to enter heaven.

Only it is well to remember that riches are not by any

means the only possessions that people find it difficult to leave. If that were so all would come to Jesus eagerly and at once, and there would be crowds at His feet who are now too far away, there would be plenty to take up the cross and follow Him who are now carrying all other kinds of burdens, and finding their own lonely way among the broken and uneven paths of sin. They cry with complaining querulousness, "Who will show us any good?" They wander about with doleful faces, seeking light and joy and finding none. There is a tone of bitterness in the words they speak, and a great weariness in their hearts. One comes to them, with gentleness and love and infinite compassion. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." And again, as in the old time, they go away grieved.

"But in this case they cannot be kept away by their possessions."

Ah! but they are. Surely if nothing hindered them they would come. What riches have they that are dearer to them than the rest, and joy, and peace of God?

Some there are who stay away from Christ because of the care and sorrow of their lives. They are told that He will help them, but they are bent upon helping themselves. They know that He can save them, but they say, "Talk to the happy about all that; we are too wretched to listen." They have indeed possessions, but they are aching hearts and weary heads, they are dismal forebodings and frightful fears. Strange things to keep them from life and immortal gladness!

Others have great possessions of peculiar ideas. They exalt themselves, their mighty reason, their noble characters, their powers of thought into something which serves to keep them from obtaining the highest good. How can they stoop to sue for mercy when they are so marvellously rich in intellect? How can they leave all and follow Jesus when they would have so very much to leave?

Yet others possess objects of interest in friends to keep them away. They are so occupied in dwelling upon the treasures they have found, and so inclined to feel satisfied with their great gain, that Jesus of Nazareth passes by in vain for them. Their eyes are occupied in looking back love for love. Their hearts are throbbing too wildly to allow

them to composedly "leave all and follow the Saviour." They are very rich, and how, then, can they be expected to forsake their possessions?

So are there not thousands of young and old who, though they are not rulers, find their riches a snare? And is it not necessary for us all to remember that anything which comes between us and the Master should be shunned?

We make great mistakes. We love to gather riches and forget the holes in our bags, forget that moth and rust do corrupt, and thieves break through and steal.

Unpalatable Truths.

A LADY was reading to her little son from a certain book. The words were plain and simple, and they taught the old-fashioned but so often unpleasant truth that God can see us at all times, and under all circumstances. The child was quiet and thoughtful for a minute, then he said, "Mamma, does the book mean that God saw me that day when I took the strawberries?"

"Yes, Willie; that is exactly what it means."

A flush of anger came upon the child's face.

"Ma, put that book away! It is not a nice book! I don't want to hear any more of it."

That was a very honest child; but then children are honest.

Those who are older do not so readily confess it, although they, too, know what it is to dislike books and persons and places that are the means of conveying to them unpleasant truths.

The child was ingenuous, but men and women are rather given to hide their real feelings behind a veil of bland words, and do not own the dislike they feel. If for one whole day every one so far forgot himself as to confess the truth, what an insight would be gained into the

different cases of those who would rather hear any nonsense in the world than some kinds of truth.

Perhaps none of us really know ourselves. We are very apt to be self-deceivers, and think that we are far better and nobler than we really are. And yet there is a sort of suspicion within us sometimes—a consciousness that we are not what we seem, which is not agreeable to our vanity. Besides this, and quite as hard to bear, is the half-doubt that other people are not as blind as we wish, and know us better than they seem to do. So that we do not often in very sincerity sigh for the angel to

"the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us."

That would be very well if they saw us through rose-coloured spectacles, but we know that on the contrary they look at us often with very keen eyes, and so we would rather hear what they say than what they think of us.

But it is probable that the mother of the child above referred to did not put the disagreeable book away at once and for good. Evidently it had a purpose to serve, for it carried conviction to the heart of the little one. If only we could have the same power exercised over us, how much better many of us would be. The worst of it is, that we are old enough to do as we like, and, excepting on very rare occasions, refuse successfully to listen to or read truths that are unpleasant. It it a bad thing for us. We should be much better if it were not for our wilful blindness to our own badness. To see the evil and acknowledge it is a step towards deploring and remedying it. We see this in the case of children. We remind them of their faults, compel them to look at them, and hear of them; we do not allow them to forget their existence, and we do this not because we delight in making them uncomfortable, but because we believe it to be wise and kind, having their best interests before us. Why do we not try the same kind of training with regard to ourselves? It would make us more what we ought to be. We should have the less reason every night for sorrow over

"The ills that we this day have done;"

we should have a less unquiet conscience, a less careworn heart. But we are like foolish people who do not know what is for their real good, or, knowing, will not adopt the better course.

This silence with regard to our errors which we impose upon all with whom we have to do is at the root of much of the evil of our day. We will not let men speak or write honestly of what are our real faults. Let a preacher try it, fearlessly exposing what he knows to be the sins of certain persons in his congregation, and he will begin to be unpopular. Let a friend, instead of insinuating pleasant and sweet flatteries, speak some bitter truth about the worse side of our character, and it will be wonderful if our love for him be not a little shaken. The courtesies of society prevent common honesty, and foster insincerity too often. It is not easy, and it is certainly not agreeable, to say unpleasant things; but is it not at least possible that we should be all the better for having them said, even though we were angry with the speaker who uttered them?

It is perfectly safe to speak of some faults, provided that they happen to be those of which we are not guilty. They may be prevalent, and we can unite with our friends in frowning upon them, finding it very pleasant pastime because we are not ourselves touched by the whip of scorn. The sensational novels of the day are popular, not because they pass over sins of all kinds, but because they deal with exceptional sins. The multitude is not tempted to commit them, and so it can be very righteous in its indignation against them. If, instead of murders and elopements, novelists wrote of dishonesty, meannesses, little lies, and selfishness, their readers would be made more uncomfortable, but a little good might be done even by the lightest literature.

We cannot, perhaps, be made to like unpalatable truths, but we might force ourselves to take them. We should be probably better and stronger if we would have the courage to face the truth more often. There might, perhaps, in this time, when so many are longing for spheres of usefulness, be a band of self-denying persons who would undertake to tell the world, and especially individuals in it, the honest though disagreeable truth. They would

have to be martyrs to their cause, no doubt, but they, perhaps, would not mind that if they accomplished the good work. Better still would it be if we made ourselves search out and confess the truth with regard to ourselves. Why should we be at such pains to conceal facts? Would it not be better to pray that we may know ourselves, and also better know the Power which can make us what we wish to seem? Let us not be too proud to be taught the truth, and let us be humble enough to seek to be made better.

Overheard Sentences.

PERSONS who are more given to listening than to talking hear many interesting things. Those who are in the habit of walking along the streets giving attention to the words that are dropped by other passers by may often hear sentences which contain volumes in themselves, and from which almost a life's history may be educed. Those two may never meet again, and yet the one has learnt, it may be, more from a few words spoken not for his ear than months of intimacy would teach. They are strangers, never having even looked into each other's faces, and yet the chance listener has had a glimpse into the inner life of the other, and has food for future reflection. For it is exceedingly interesting to think over these broken phrases, uttered only with a purely personal meaning, as they refer to the great, busy, thinking, feeling world around.

As an illustration of what may be done in this way, one incident may be mentioned. A person who had stepped for shelter during a shower into the doorway of a cottage, heard this remark from the lips of a poor lacemaker: "*He was five years old when he died, and that is a very taking age. Ah! he left a great unkedness behind him.*" "A great unkedness!" People unused to the dialect of country places in the midland counties might wonder what the word means, but those who understand it know that it is exceedingly expressive. It is synonymous with dismal,

lonely, desolate, wretched. The woman meant that for her life had settled down into a thick November fog, that her house and her arms were empty, that the music which had played around her heart had sunk into silence, that for her there were no more flowers or gladness, only a dreary waste, which her tired feet must travel alone. Poor woman! One longed to know a little more about her, especially whether her pained heart had been drawn toward the better home where her little lost lamb was safely folded; and whether she knew how tenderly the good Shepherd watched her in her sorrow.

It is sad to think that the place of this lacemaker is not the only one by thousands where a "*great unkedness*" has been left. Did you ever stand on a hill and look down upon clusters of houses at any hour of the day or night without thinking that, in many of them at least, there was a dark guest whose name is Sorrow? Life is going on all the same, restless hands are toiling away at the daily work before them; men with grave faces, whose foreheads are oftener than not knit into a frown; women with pale patient faces, more grievous to see than any signs of fury; little children more quiet and subdued than they should be all at work, crowds jostling each other on the pavement with very little mirth, and less music about them, buying and selling going on as usual, but there is a great unkedness at home! The fires are lighted, the table is spread, and many of the chairs are filled, and yet the house is sad and quiet and empty. How many get through their lives, doing their duty bravely too, with that dark shadow ever before them! We cannot always see when they are affected by it, they do not talk much about it, they have no tragic airs, no martyr-like appearance; they speak and are spoken to, they listen to our small-talk, and even smile at it, but all the time, down in the depths of their nature, they are feeling very "unked."

The effect is produced by many causes. Some light has gone out that was the one lamp which could have brightened the life it shone upon. Some flower has faded that bore in its bosom a mysterious sweetness which no other flower on all the earth can have. Some heart has failed upon which that other heart leant with too intense a love. Temptation came, and he who was thought too

strong and pure for evil fell beneath it, losing all in the fall. Or some one else stole away the love that could not but be precious to whomsoever it was given. Or death came, and removed the very life of all the happiness that was in the home. Or it may be that the "unkedness" is within, rather than without, for the soul, grieving over its own lost youth, its lost opportunities, and its lost goodness, refuses to be comforted.

What is to be done with this sad legacy of "unkedness" which has been left to so many of us? Clearly it is not to be allowed to altogether enwrap us in its dark folds. It is not to fill our homes nor our hearts, so as to exclude all other guests such as pleasure, cheerfulness, and love. Even if joy be gone, there is still duty left, and it has more satisfying sweetness connected with it than most of us are willing to believe. The self-denial that makes people resolutely keep down their own sorrow that they might alleviate that of others, is almost a specific for "unkedness." And always there is, within reach of us, the sympathy of the Divine Consoler, whose mission it is to bind up the broken-hearted. Happy are all, who, not withstanding the mists and miseries that are around their lives, through faith in Him, will have another home, in which the heart shall be no longer desolate, but fully satisfied, for there "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." There, at least, if we should overhear any dropped sentences there will be nothing said about "unkedness."

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